No. 640.] For Week Ending April 6, 1901. [One Penny.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 640.] For the Week Ending April 6th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE CLIENT IN THE PINK MASK.

ARRIVING in St. James' Street one pleasant forenoon at the height of a brilliant season, Mr. Pontifex found, halted by the kerb near the entrance to the old-fashioned stucco block which contained his offices, a gleaming brougham with a coroneted crest on the panel. The eagle glance of the lawyer rested momentarily upon the aristocratic symbol—it was that of an earl.

Mr. Pontifex, returning to his own thoughts, strode out of the May sunshine and passed in at the gloomy door labelled: "Hugo Pontifex, Solicitor."

The lawyer's clerk rose at his chief's dry "Good morning," and followed the latter into his private apartment, where Mr. Pontifex was already sorting his correspondence.

"The Earl of Tarbet is in the waiting-room, sir," he observed deferentially, using the soft, even tones characteristic of those who are slightly deaf, "he has been here for some while. He wished me to say that he would be glad if you could see him immediately on your arrival. He has another gentleman with him, sir."

Hugo Pontifex looked meditatively from the window at the tall roans and the glittering enamel of the carriage that had previously arrested his attention. The name which had just been pronounced was absolutely unfamiliar to him, but his expression did not betray the fact. He noticed that there was some degree of excitement in the usually staid demeanour of his clerk. Yet it was against Mr. Pontifex's principles to question a subordinate.

"Show them in at once," he ordered curtly. His assistant withdrew—deaf as he was, he had no difficulty in hearing the lawyer's crisp syllables.

Mr. Pontifex sat down and concluded the hasty analysis of his morning mail. The clerk had omitted to latch the door leading to the general office—it swung silently ajar to admit a couple of persons; one, handsome, youthful, almost boyish; the other, middle-aged, gaunt and stooping.

At the sight of his visitors Hugo Pontifex sprang up, for once startled out of his self-possession. The elder of the two wore a mask—a pink silk mask, covering his face from throat to forehead.

The younger man crossed the threshold, guiding his companion. The solicitor perceived that the dark orbs, visible through the aperture of the mask, were false—his gaunt and stooping client was blind!

"Mr. Pontifex," explained the junior of the newcomers, "this is Lord Tarbet, I am Lord Charles Everton. Lord Tarbet wishes to consult you alone; if he should want me, or when you have finished your talk, pray let me know, I shall be in the waiting-room." And, having made this courteous intimation, he piloted his charge to a seat, bowed to Hugo Pontifex and left the lawyer *tête-à-tête* with his singular client of the pink mask.

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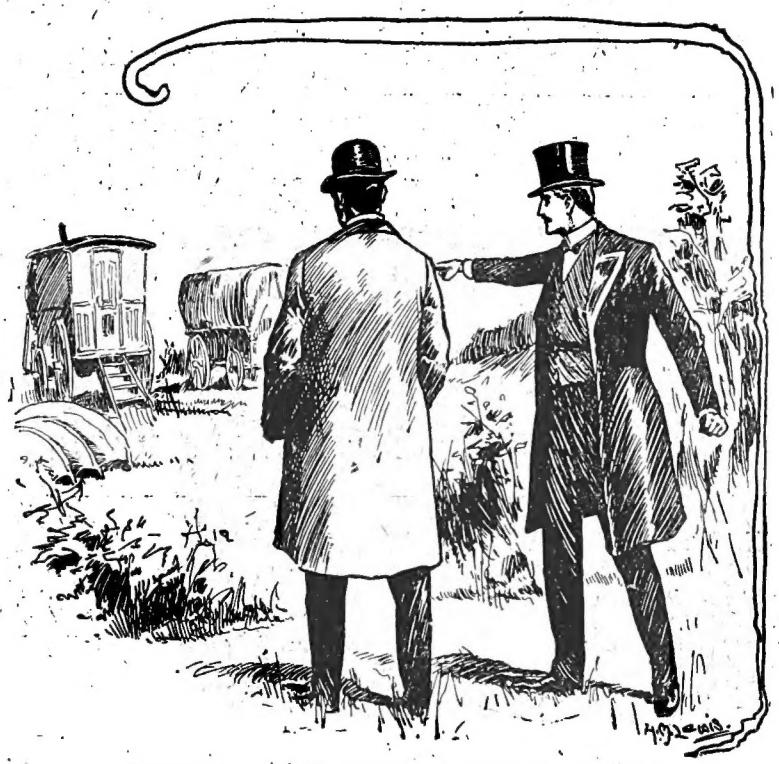
Mr. Pontifex lifted his chair into the neighbourhood of the blind man's.

"I am pleased to meet you, Lord Tarbet," he said, "I trust I may prove of service to you."

"Doubtless," answered a grave voice, muffled behind the unmoving mask, "yet, it is possible that, when you have learnt the circumstances upon which I seek your advice, even you will despair of aiding me."

"I shall be better able to judge of that, Lord Tarbet, when I have heard what you have to tell me," retorted the solicitor briefly.

"That is so," admitted his mysterious client. "Mr. Pontifex, unlikely as it may appear, I am but forty-six years of age; the late earl and I were second cousins.



"The brown caravan is my darling's prison. Shall we carry it by storm?"

A quarter of a century ago I was a young Shropshire squire with two good lives between me and the Tarbet title. I had wooed, won and, by stealth, married a pretty girl of humble station, an orphan, a certain Hilda Lessing. She had a sister Naomi, they were of gipsy blood on their mother's side. Their father had been a cottager upon a local estate."

Lord Tarbet paused and put his left palm abruptly to his breast. A shuddering sigh escaped him, but he went on determinedly.

"I had removed Hilda into Cornwall; Naomi was not informed of her sister's whereabouts, or of our marriage. We had one child, a girl—Florence we called her. By the time the child knew its alphabet, I had grown weary of its mother."

He hesitated and poised his masked head as if to listen.

"You can guarantee us secure from eavesdroppers?" he asked significantly.

"My clerk is deaf," was the reply; "and nothing less than the noise of a pistol shot would penetrate these walls."

Lord Tarbet made a gesture of comprehension.

"Also," he resumed; "I had moved a step higher in the Tarbet succession, and being a reputed bachelor, had come to be considered eligible. To crown all I had fallen in love with a rich and pretty woman. In this quandary I decided—you are a lawyer, Mr Pontifex, and I spare you excuses—to rid myself of Hilda. Let me get over the worst in a breath—I—I murdered her."

The fingers that had been pressed upon the speaker's bosom clutched it in apparent agony. Lord Tarbet snatched something from a vest-pocket, slipped it into his handkerchief, and squeezed it.

There was a faint sound—a species of tiny explosions. The Earl held the crumpled linen to his nostrils, gasping a few phrases of reassurance.

"I shall soon recover," he murmured, "nitrate of emyl keeps me alive—I have angina pectoris, spasm of the heart; don't summon Everton."

Hugo Pontifex scrutinized the writhing figure in the pink mask. At length Lord Tarbet steadied his shaking frame.

"What was I saying?" he queried weakly, "yes, I remember, that I murdered Hilda. I visited her, secretly, in Cornwall—where at any rate, I was only known, except to Hilda, by an alias—took her for a stroll on the cliffs one night, and brought about an—an accident. The horrible business done, I left the district by a circuitous route. Hilda was picked up at the foot of the precipice, not, as I had expected, dead, but dying. She was able to state, in proper legal form, that she had been pushed over the cliff by her husband, but, strangely enough, did not reveal my real identity. Yet, she had Naomi telegraphed for, and, as I gathered subsequently, told her everything."

The Earl shook the glass film of the burst capsule out of his handkerchief. The paroxysm was over.

"The object of this," pursued Lord Tarbet, "was not divulged to me until after Hilda's death and the practical abandonment of the search for her murderer. Then Naomi defined her position; so long as Florence, Hilda's child and mine, should be in Naomi's custody, Naomi herself was pledged not to disclose that it was I who had been her sister's husband. Hilda had not saved me for my own sake, but to avoid, if possible, throwing upon her daughter's life the shadow of a public trial. I willingly accepted the terms, indeed, I had never intended to claim the girl—it would have been putting my neck in the noose to dream of it."

Mr. Pontifex knitted his brows. He was in the habit of suspending his judgment where the conduct of a client was concerned. But he was passionately fond of children, and the earl's brutal candour revolted him.

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"Three months later," said Lord Tarbet, "I married again. Naomi read of it in the newspapers, and conceived, apparently, the idea of revenging her sister's wrongs, without violating the promise into which she had entered. Waylaying me in my own grounds, she flung a quantity of vitriol in my face and fled. Hence this mask!"

He undid one of the fastenings and raised a corner. The solicitor's nerves were of iron, yet he shrank from the spectacle.

"I dared not prosecute her," added the earl, restoring the pink silk screen, "and the affliction that condemned me to perpetual seclusion is still, thanks to my mask, an enigma to Society. Ultimately I became Earl of Tarbet, and, shortly afterwards, a widower again, my second wife dying childless. In my solitude a longing seized upon me for something to cherish and make much of. I remembered my little Florence, the child of the woman I had so foully wronged. I had her stolen, by trustworthy agents, from her grim guardian, Naomi Lessing, and sent abroad, temporarily, to school."

Mr. Pontifex's stern mouth softened; so Lord Tarbet was human!

"Naomi suspected me," proceeded the Earl, "and demanded an explanation. In the end I managed to hoodwink her; perhaps the realization of the wreck she had transformed me to abashed her. At all events, she seemed to believe me innocent of any share in Florence's disappearance. When I had evaded that peril I brought Florence home to Tarbet Castle, and guilty as I was, I taught her to love me, though she has never seen me unmasked. To-day she is a charming girl of nineteen, the betrothed of Lord Charles Everton, the sunshine of his existence and mine. To-day, alas! she is once more the prisoner of Naomi Lessing."

The lawyer sighed involuntarily—the final twist of the tangled skein had, he felt, been exposed.

"Kidnapped?" he inquired.

"She vanished into space," said Lord Tarbet, "a month past, from the park of my country-place near St. Albans. A detective employed by Everton—who knows nothing of my crime and its consequences—has tracked her with marvellous skill. He believes her to be the prisoner of a band of gipsies, at present encamped in Epping Forest. I told you the Lessings were of gipsy blood—I recognise Naomi in his description of Florence's keeper. He reported to us at my town house yesterday and Everton was wild to set off instantly, but I persuaded him to remain till I could see you. What shall I do—what can I do?"

"What do you most wish to do?" Hugo Pontifex rejoined coolly; "protect yourself or secure your daughter's happiness?"

"Think only of Florence," intreated the Earl; "she loves Everton and he worships the ground she treads on. But do as we will we cannot preserve their happiness, Mr. Pontifex. Naomi will not break her promise to Hilda by parting with Florence, and if Everton invokes the law, he will but lay bare the story of my guilt."

He crushed another capsule into his handkerchief and inhaled the drug.

"Everton fancies my first wife died on the Continent, after a secret marriage," he confessed. "I must not delude myself that when he learns the hideous truth he will continue loyal to Florence, though her father should atone for his offence on the scaffold. Besides, he is a younger son; his family would ostracise him—Florence would become a social outcast."

"I am Lady Florence!" she gasped. "Don't leave me; I'm not mad!"

"Not if her father died honourably in his own house," answered the solicitor, with a quiet significance; "leaving the conduct of this case to some discreet negotiator."

Lord Tarbet stiffened suddenly in his seat; the mask rendered his visage as fixed as that of a statue, but his twitching fingers bore witness to his uncontrollable emotion.

"If Lady Florence," said Mr. Pontifex, "were to be reclaimed from Naomi Lessing, under a threat of police prosecution, and Naomi Lessing might be informed, with truth——" the solicitor lingered over the clause and repeated it—"with truth," he reiterated, "that you were dead, she could, I am sure, be induced to respect the peace of her sister's child."

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The Earl was trembling violently; his tongue moistened his dry lips, lending a strange air of life to the masked features.

"Go on," he faltered.

"There is no more to say," responded Mr. Pontifex. "You observed, I recollect, that your capsules kept you alive. In your place, I should lock up my capsules, say to-night."

Lord Tarbet got on to his feet; he was shuddering frightfully.

"You are a brave man," he stammered. "I will do it; it is a just reparation. Have me driven home and arrange with Everton to take what steps you will. Occupy him for the rest of the morning—I ask no longer."

He held out a tremulous hand.

"We shall not meet again," he said almost apologetically. Mr. Pontifex, touched by an impulse of pity, clasped the extended fingers. Then he summoned his clerk and sent for Lord Charles Everton.

"Take me to my carriage, Charlie," desired Lord Tarbet; "I shall not want you further than the pavement. Mr. Pontifex desires your company; he will go towards Epping with you, eh, Mr. Pontifex?"

"I think it will be best, Lord Tarbet," replied the solicitor.

Lord Charles' youthful countenance lit with joy.

"That is good!" he exclaimed; "do we start at once, Mr. Pontifex?"

"At once," said the lawyer, distinctly; "we shall probably get back early this afternoon."

The Earl turned his masked face towards them, the expressionless glass orbs shining in it.

"I will be ready for you," he answered; "come, Everton."

And leaning heavily on his companion's arm, the Earl of Tarbet passed out of the apartment.

From the window Mr. Pontifex watched the tall roans clatter off with the gleaming brougham. When Lord Charles returned to the room, the solicitor had substituted a morning-coat for his frock, slipped a grey raglan over it, and was donning a felt hat.

Thus equipped, his costume resembled that of his younger client. Mr. Pontifex ordered the inevitable hansom and they set out for Liverpool Street and the Great Eastern terminus.

By twelve they had walked from Chingford into Epping Forest, Lord Charles calculating their direction from the report of his astute detective. As the sun crossed the zenith they came on the gipsy encampment for which they had been searching. It consisted of a pair of caravans, with some low, basin-shaped huts, and appeared to be, for the moment, almost deserted.

"If my man was not wrong," said Lord Charles "the brown caravan is my darling's prison. Shall we carry it by storm?"

Mr. Pontifex laid his strong palm on the young man's shoulder.

"Let me challenge the fortress," he advised; "Lord Charles, these gipsies, the Earl fears, have an old grudge against him, and so have struck at Lady Florence. He has intrusted to me certain facts that may enable me to—to pacify them. If I cannot do so I will call you to my assistance."

Without staying for an answer to this request, he strode up to the brown caravan, climbed the steps, and, with a formal tap at the glassed portal, entered.

It was tenanted by two seated women, one grey-haired and powerful, the other fair, slender and girlish. Both leapt up, the former with a cry of anger, the latter with a shriek of excitement.

"Woman!" said Pontifex, "your last card is trumped. Lord Tarbet is dead!"

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"I want Lady Florence, Lord Tarbet's daughter," said the solicitor, evading the elder woman, who sought to thrust him from the vehicle. The girl darted to his side and clung against him.

"I am Lady Florence!" she gasped; "don't leave me, I am not mad these clothes are not mine, she has dyed my face and hair. But I am Lord Tarbet's daughter all the same."

The lawyer opened the small exit behind him—forcing the grey-haired fury back with knee and elbow—and whistled; Lord Charles came running. Lady Florence saw him and stumbled down the rickety ladder into his arms. Mr. Pontifex shut the door.

"Naomi Lessing," he said firmly; "you are in strong hands at last. Utter a single threat and I will have you gaoled before the day is out."

The gipsy folded her arms and laughed shrilly.

"As you will," she told him; "but first hear me. If my niece is not under this wooden roof in five minutes I go to Chingford and put the police on the track of Tarbet the murderer."

Mr. Pontifex took her by the wrist.

"Scotland Yard is better," he suggested; "we will go to town together."

Naomi Lessing flung her shawl over her head.

"He has told you to defy me, has he?" she muttered. "Very wel—he cheated me out of Florence all those years—I gave him one chance, now I will pay the debt I owe him."

She motioned proudly to the exit.

"I accept," she said. "We will go to town together—you to Cavendish Square, I to Scotland Yard."

The solicitor bowed her out and followed her.

Not far off Lord Charles Everton was waiting, bewilderedly supporting his betrothed. With her dyed hair and stained complexion Lady Florence made a fascinating gipsy.

"Go forward and get us some sort of a closed conveyance," Mr. Pontifex whispered to her puzzled cavalier; "this person will accompany us."

Lord Charles stared, but the lawyer frowned instantly, and he hastened off, resigning Lady Florence to Mr. Pontifex's care.

The solicitor did not address either of his charges and they walked on in silence. At the western edge of the forest Lord Charles met them with a hired two-horse victoria.

The singular quartette got in, Mr. Pontifex giving the order, "London. Cavendish Square."

The driver scratched his cranium, but whipped up his team, notwithstanding.

It was a long drive from Chingford to Belgravia and the afternoon was nearly spent when they reached their journey's end. The lawyer—prompted by Lord Charles—indicated the town-house of the Tarbets and the victoria drew up.

"You must explain your determination in Lord Tarbet's presence," said Pontifex aloud, to the gipsy Naomi. She tossed her grey head contemptuously, but vouchsafed no other reply. Meanwhile Lord Charles had alighted, mounted the steps, and rung the bell. A footman was answering him. Mr. Pontifex's heart beat a trifle more quickly as he, too, left the carriage and ascended the stone flight.

"Tell Lord Tarbet that Mr. Pontifex and I are here, and see that there is no one in the library—we shall want it," Lord Charles Everton was saying.

The footman gazed at him with compassion.

"We—we've very bad news for you, my lord," he rejoined, hesitatingly; "his lordship had one of his attacks shortly after returning home. He—he did not rally as usual, my lord, and passed away—while unconscious, my lord."

"Good Heavens," cried Lord Charles, "Mr. Pontifex, this is horrible. Flo and I both absent—how can I tell her!"

"Bring Lady Florence in before breaking the news," recommended the solicitor; "as for the other person, I will attend to her."

He waited till Naomi Lessing was alone in the victoria, and then approached the window of the conveyance.

"Woman!" he said, "your last card is trumped—Lord Tarbet is dead!"

Naomi Lessing, startled, looked at the stern countenance of the lawyer. It terrified her with its expression of cold, intelligent power.

"He is, therefore, beyond your vengeance or that of the Law," added Mr. Pontifex deliberately; "but, if you desire to, you can attempt, by a futile scandal, to blast the happiness of your sister's child, as you did the features of her husband. You are at liberty to do your worst."

The solicitor went to the box of the victoria, and gave the man a sovereign. "Drive to Scotland Yard," he ordered. Then, without glancing round, he stalked up the steps of Tarbet House, and disappeared into the hall.

* * * * *

Naomi Lessing's cab never reached the great police depot, or, if it did, the authorities learning Lord Tarbet's death, refrained from publishing her accusation, and Lady Florence mourned for her father in ignorance of his crime. There had been a veil upon his life as there had been one upon his ruined visage. He carried both to his grave, for, according to the terms of his will, they buried him in the pink silk mask.

"The Fate of Michael Stanbridge."

BEGINS

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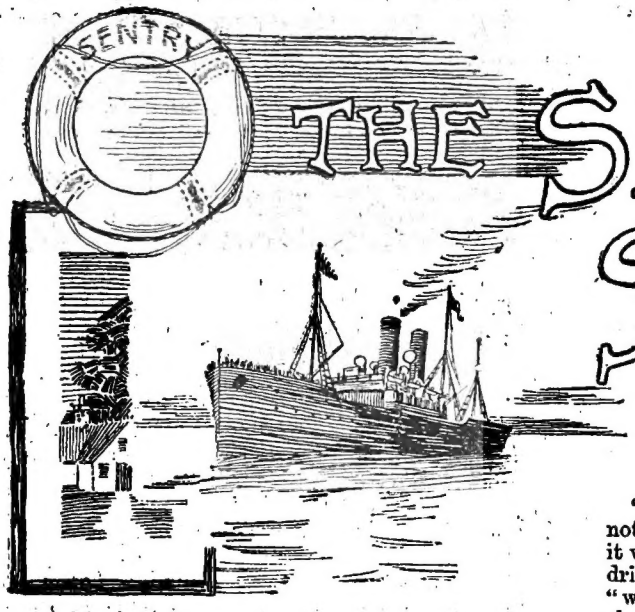

THE SANZIER SCANDAL

THE signal that the English mail is in sight has been flying since daybreak from the flagstaff by the little station on the cliff.

Long before the lazy town of Hootsville is well awake from its crapulous slumbers, the red hull, white funnels, and tall tapering masts of the long expected steamer might have been seen from the shore, as she grew out of the horizon and came up, panting and throbbing, through the rays of the rising sun.

Within a hundred yards of the harbour, her engines ease off, and she lies rolling on the heavy ground-swell of the Bay of Susquannah. And now a puff of smoke from her little gun, followed by a little report, which goes echoing and re-echoing through the gullies of the heights above the town, till it is caught up and silenced in the dreary moaning of the fog-horn, announces to the capital of the rising colony of Susquannah the arrival of the royal mail steamship *Sentry*.

Soon a string of dusky cabmen, shouting at and flogging their wretched cattle, come racing down the long road to the docks. Coolies and loafers—whose name is legion—drag themselves, blinking and yawning, from the friendly shade of the warehouses, and swell the motley mob making for the pier-head.

Mr. Port-Officer Leaming, in all the pomp and circumstance of a gig and coloured crew, puts off to board the new-comer and satisfy himself as to her state of health during the voyage.

And when this delicate matter has been settled, the screw of the *Sentry* revolves once more, and, amid the feeble cheering of the emigrants on the forecastle, she sweeps slowly into the dock.

Standing apart from the other passengers was a young lady dressed in deep mourning, whose graceful figure and very beautiful face were apparently familiar to many of the shore-people, who now came swarming on board as soon as the ship was moored at the side of the quay. But the majority of those who recognised her, either passed on with a rude, surprised stare, or stopped and saluted her with a mixture of freedom and pity, which was more offensive than the cut direct; and, indeed, so keenly did the poor girl—who, but a few months before, had been the proudest and brightest in Hootsville—feel her present position that at last she pulled down her veil as her tears began to fall.

"I know it is stupid to be hurt at all this; but, but I am not so strong as I thought. However, it will be all right; it will all be right when I have seen Walter."—and she dried her eyes as she whispered these hopes to herself—"when I have seen him, and heard the truth," and then she burst out crying again.

But her weakness, if it was such, was quickly detected; for a hand was laid heavily on her shoulder, and a harsh voice growled:

"Come, then; is it thus we commence anew, my child?"

She at once recovered herself, and calmly held up her cheek to be brushed by the bristly moustache of an old Frenchman, who stood leaning over her. She seemed accustomed to the tone and manner of this worthy gentleman, and was in no way surprised at her welcome, which, to say the least of it, was not demonstrative after a year's separation. But then he was her uncle, and many uncles are not demonstrative at any time. His name was Armand Sanzier, and his friends hinted that he had left his native country for the benefit of his fatherland. His antecedents were dubious; his addiction to drink, unlike the rest of his fellow-countrymen, was indubitable; and his temper and habits were so peculiar that even the gay people of Hootsville—and they were really not squeamish—showed no anxiety to cultivate his acquaintance.

"So then," he asked, peering round suspiciously, and growling at a newsboy who stood bawling in front of them, "you understood my letter? You are wise to come so readily to your old uncle and guardian now, my Delphine."

"I understood nothing," answered Delphine, "but that it was absolutely necessary for law business, and so on, about the estate, for me to return as soon as I had recovered; but I did not understand your—your insinuations about Walter."

"But yes," returned the old man, avoiding the searching look in the girl's great grey eyes, "he quite altered after your father's death. But," he added, turning fiercely on his niece, "you have dared to disobey me in writing to the scoundrel—say then?"

"Let go my arm, please," replied Miss Delphine Sanzier, "and do not call Mr. Naughton names in my presence. He has written and explained the reasons which prevented him from meeting me in England, as we had arranged; and I have written to him explaining everything—my coming back here, what you

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have said in your letter to me, and what you expect me to do. I hadn't time to write, except by this mail, and he will get that letter to-day. But I shall decline to believe one word you tell me about him until I hear the truth from his own lips. Had we not better leave the ship? These people seem to take an interest in us." And she moved away.

"One word, my child," muttered Armand, as he followed close at her side.

"Did he tell you that by the death of some brutal English relative, he is now rich—that he resigns his appointment, that he starts to-morrow by this very steamer for the upper coast *en route* for Aden? Ha!" And he passed his arm round his niece, who leant pale and fainting, against his shoulder as he whispered this cruel news into her ear. But she quickly regained sufficient composure to walk firmly towards the gangway, after pointing out her pile of luggage to her uncle.

The latter, satisfied with the effect of his information, followed her off the ship, saying triumphantly to himself:

"Now, if I can only keep her out of that fellow's way till to-morrow, all will go well."

* * * * *

The members of the Colonial Office in Hootsville were preparing to separate, after discharging their more or less arduous duties in a more or less zealous and able manner.

The chief clerk and his favourite satellites were assembled for "just one peg" before braving the red dust and sunshine in the streets.

They were all very nice young men in their way, and were beautifully arrayed in the height of Colonial fashion. Some of them had sauntered through a mute career at an English university or had appeared at competitive examinations with a certain sameness of result. Some said they came to Susquannah for their health, though their stock of that commodity was enviable; others said they came out "on spec"—and these, perhaps, spoke the truth.

There they were, however; and they tried to make the best of the "refuge for the destitute," as the Civil Service of Susquannah was facetiously termed.

The chief clerk, Mr. Shadrach Slinger, was preparing to tell a well-known chestnut when a tap was heard at the door.

"A dun! a dun!" sighed a diplomatist, slipping behind a screen from sheer force of habit, whilst the others promptly fumbled a few papers or looked into ledgers.

The chief clerk, putting on his official scowl, bawled out:

"Come in!"

Escorted by the office messenger, a smartly-dressed, handsome young woman, all smiles, entered unabashed, and begged the favour of an interview with the chief clerk.

The jaded officials at once took the hint, and their hats as well, levelling Parthian glances at the pretty Creole as they strolled away.

"I say, Croizette, this won't do, you know!" ejaculated Slinger.

"Monsieur must please excuse me: but has he seen the passenger-list of the *Sentry*, which arrived this morning?"

"Passenger-list? No. What if I had?" he asked pettishly.

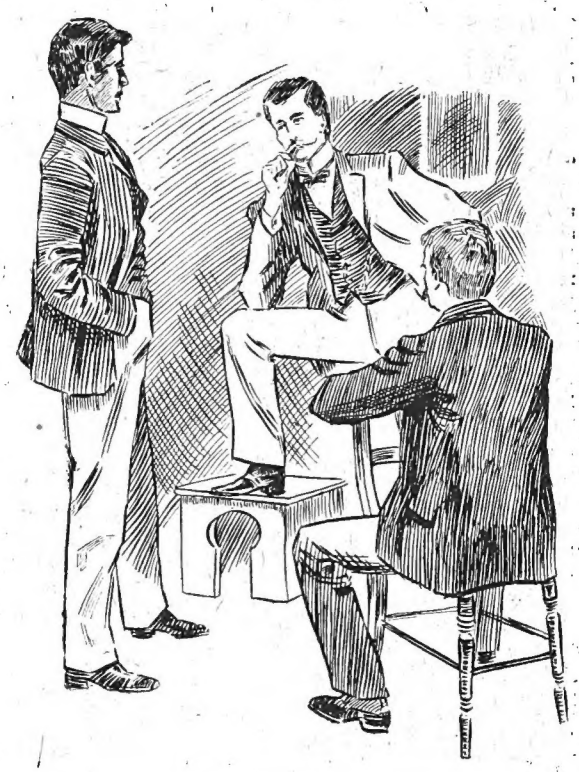
"In that case," said the Creole, quietly seating herself in the coolest corner of the room, "monsieur would have seen the name of my young mistress, Mademoiselle Sanzier."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Slinger, looking aghast.

"Exactly, monsieur the chief clerk. But I have a note for Mr. Naughton, which must be placed in his hands to-night, at all cost. Can you then, my dear gentleman, direct one to him?"

"It depends; but look here, I am not going to lend a helping hand to any mischief, you know."

"There will be mischief," said the girl significantly, "if this Mr. Naughton forsakes my mistress."



The chief clerk was preparing to tell a well-known chestnut.

"I know nothing about that," said the chief clerk, who took a common-sense view of the matter.

"I am in despair," cried the girl. "I must return before sunset to Lagaras—it is a long up-hill drive—or that old fox will suspect me. He has been watching my mistress the whole day as a cat does a mouse."

"Who?" growled Mr. Slinger; "that scoundrel of a Sanzier?"

"But yes. Pardon, monsieur," continued the girl, "can you suggest how I am to get this note to Mr. Naughton?"

"I can't, indeed," was the answer; and the chief clerk stood on the hearthrug impatiently tugging at his moustache.

Suddenly a tall figure appeared at one of the windows, which opened down to the ground of the office courtyard.

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"Ha! there you are! On the crank still?" cried the new-comer, stepping in over the sill, and closing the French shutters after him. "Pouf! how blazing hot it is! Well, I've done my p.p.c. visits, thank goodness; paid my 'ticks,' packed my traps, and am off by the morning mail." And, ignorant of the presence of the lady's maid in the darkened room, he proceeded to light a cigar.

Slinger touched him on the elbow, and, looking up, he saw the girl standing in front of him, holding out the note.

"Croizette!" he mutters, dropping the lighted match. "What's this?"

"A note for Mr. Naughton. I have the honour to await an answer." And she smiled at the chief clerk, who scowled in return.

Naughton seized the slip of paper, tore it open, and read:

For Heaven's sake, see me before you go.

He stood for a few moments lost in thought, and then telling Croizette to follow him to his lodgings, he bade his friend good-bye, and hurried from the room.

* * * * * *

Lagaras, the property of Delphine Sanzier, and the home of her uncle and guardian, lies at some height above Hootsville on the high-road over the mountain range to St. Lucie, the trading-station on the northern side of the island of Susquannah. Nestling under the shelter of the hills which rise behind, and fronting the straggling town and broad bay which lie below, the great comfortable buildings, vast courtyards and outhouses, with carefully tended grounds teeming with vegetation, and rich plantations stretching far away to the coastline, are attractive enough to make many a man's mouth water; and this effect, it may be added they certainly produced upon the present manager of the estate, good Armand Sanzier.

Inside the house, dinner, which most certainly was not of herbs and contentment therewith, had dragged its weary length through a profusion of dishes and messes; and the "master"—for so Armand preferred to be styled—began to brace himself for the coming breeze by making a furious onslaught on the contents of the decanters, roundly abusing the frightened negroes who waited at table.

He sat for a short time gulping down his wine and watching closely his niece, who had moved to a chair near the open window.

"It appears that my beautiful niece is not pleased with what her old uncle has done for her benefit," remarked Armand huskily, for he had dined not wisely, but too well.

"If you consider that by trying to separate Walter and myself you have acted for my benefit," replied Delphine, in contemptuous tones, "you are utterly mistaken."

"Indeed!" sneered Armand. "Was it not better that you should return to your proper home instead of staying in Paris, without protection?"

"I am the best judge of that. But do you suppose I should have obeyed you in coming out here again, after the disgrace I have brought on my name——"

"Tut, tut—what does it matter?" sneered her uncle.

"If," continued Delphine, disregarding his interruption, "I had not expected to meet Mr. Naughton here and be married to him?"

"Pardon, my child, but this dear Naughton does not now appear anxious to be married to you."

"We shall see!" she said, with a quiet smile.

"My faith, yes, to-morrow!" he laughed.

"Let me tell you, my uncle Armand, that you are acting not only wickedly but madly. Walter, you know well, would have followed me, after I ran away to avoid exposure, had you not sued him for that money which my father had advanced him——"

"Business is business," interposed Armand, holding up his wine to the light. "But continue. This is amusing."

"And now you have the audacity," she cried excitedly, "to use your authority as my guardian to prevent our ever seeing one another again. Ah, but it is droll! This guardianship makes us laugh!"

"He laughs best who laughs last," chuckled Sanzier.

"But you know, my uncle," she said eagerly, leaning towards him, "we do not remain children always. There comes a time when one requires a guardian no longer—you understand? And if you are rash enough to reject Walter's proposals to-night, we shall——"

"Softly, softly, my little one!" growled Armand, rising with difficulty and confronting the angry girl. "I anticipate no proposals from any of your Walters this fine night. The young Lothario to whom you have referred so frequently, leaves Hootsville at daybreak *en route* for St. Lucie and Aden. This I have already mentioned, if I mistake not." And he resumed his seat with drunken gravity.

"That is true," remarked Delphine absently, for she was listening to the sound of horses' hoofs and carriage wheels, which were now audible through the open windows. "But he arrives to pay you a parting visit, my uncle," and she sprang joyfully towards the verandah.

"But no," shouted Armand furiously, "I'll have no more foolery in that quarter," and, disregarding her struggles and intreaties, he caught her up in his powerful grasp, and carried her off to her chamber at the other end of the house.

"Rest there, my little beauty," he gasped, as he thrust her roughly into the room and turned the key upon her. "Stop till I have sent your young lover about his business," and he staggered back along the passages to receive his visitor.

Armand had scarcely returned to the dining-room before Walter Naughton, heedless of the remonstrances of the half-hearted negroes, presented himself. "I must have a few words with you, Mr. Sanzier," he said, standing defiantly in the doorway, "whether you wish it or not."

"So be it," replied Armand. "One would not wish to turn *even a dog* out on a night like this. Ah, the lightning!" he growled, half starting back as a bright flash gleamed through the room and the heavy rain plashed on the verandah. "Now, my good young sir," he continued, pointing to a chair and seating himself, "may I offer you anything? No? Excuse me if I give myself one little glass"—for Armand's nerves were slightly shaken by his late athletic display at Delphine's expense, and by the presence of the unwelcome Naughton. "And now for your few words, if you please."

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"You must pardon my intrusion at this hour, but I had no other opportunity before leaving the Colony, for if I miss to-morrow's steamer I shall have to wait here another six weeks. Mr. Sanzier, what is the meaning of Delphine's sudden and unexpected return?"

"By whom unexpected?" asked Armand, smoking calmly.

"By myself, of course," returned Naughton, beginning to chafe under the Frenchman's sarcastic tone.

"And by what right, may I have the honour of inquiring, does Mr. Naughton question the movements of my niece?"

"You know well enough," said Naughton sternly,

"It appears that my beautiful niece is not pleased with what her old uncle has done for her benefit," remarked Armand, huskily.

"that, when Delphine foolishly ran away from home, I would gladly have made amends for all, and was preparing to follow her, with her father's pardon and approval—say rather, anxious wish—that we should be married as soon as possible. But before I could do anything, poor Mr. Sanzier died suddenly, and then you threw every obstacle in my way to marrying your ward, utterly crippling me at that time by buying up my debts and suing me right and left. Yes," continued Naughton, angry at the recollection of his troubles, "I know you always owed me a grudge for that black-balling business. But we're quits now, by Jove! And when you found you could harass me no further in money matters you coolly forbade me ever to mention again your niece's name!"

"And you as coolly continue to do so," remarked Armand, smothering a yawn and returning to the bottle.

"I will not detain you much longer. I merely wish you to know the extent of my 'dishonourable conduct,' as you once called it, by telling you that I have resigned my appointment, as I now have ample means, and that I intended meeting Delphine in England, where your consent to our marriage can be dispensed with——"

"After?" interrupted Delphine's guardian, who, by the way, was getting rather thick in his speech.

"But you seem to have got wind of my intentions," Naughton went on, taking no heed of the other's interruption; "for you write and get poor Delphine to come out again, under some cock-and-bull story, for the purpose of getting her under your control, and hoping that I shall have left the place without meeting her."

"And I see but little chance of a meeting, eh?" hiccoughed the host; "especially if monsieur desires to sail at daybreak from the beautiful—the charming city of Hootsville. Ha! ha!"

"Yes, yes. No doubt you have calculated it all very nicely," said Naughton soothingly, whereat the elderly gentleman began to lose his temper; "but we shall see. 'Twas a pity you forgot to reckon upon my feelings for Delphine. However, tell me once and for all, do you still refuse your consent to our marriage?"

"If I gave my consent, what arrangements would you make?"

"Arrangements? I don't quite follow you. We should certainly sell this place, if that's what you mean."

And Naughton took a turn up and down the room, with the growing conviction that the old gentleman did not very well know what he was talking about.

"Ha!" muttered Armand, putting the lighted end of his cigar into his mouth, which proved unpalatable. "And you wouldn't prefer keeping on Lagarns, and my managing it for you?"

"Oh, no," said Naughton dryly. "Neither Delphine nor I have any love for the place, after what has happened here."

"Tut, tut, that is mere sentiment," observed Armand, taking a drink of brandy. "And you would then, I suppose, in the event of my allowing you to marry my niece—who is, you must recollect, under my control until she is of age, which will not be for another two years——"

"Yes, yes," interposed Naughton wearily; "but if you allow her to marry me here in Hootsville?"

"Will you," inquired Armand, raising his eyes to Naughton, "will you investigate matters relative to—to—the investment of the sums left by my late brother?"

"It will be my duty to inquire into everything concerning my wife's property," said Naughton, looking Armand straight in the face.

"Then you shall never marry her," screamed the old man, jumping up and kicking over the chair in his passion. "Leave the house at once," he roared, shaking his fists in childish rage, "or, by——" and after fumbling aimlessly for a second or two in his coat pocket, he dashed raving from the room.

"Better not stay to be shot; he's drunk," Naughton said to himself, and, striding across the floor, he threw open the shutters, vaulted over the verandah, and dropped his long form on to the lawn below. His carriage, a light-covered buggy, with a pair of wiry, native-bred horses, were standing under a portico in charge of his servant, a white man, who, upon receiving certain whispered instructions from his master, handed the reins to Naughton, touched his hat, and sauntered away to the back premises.

And then, as they drove down the avenue, a flash of

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lightning indiscreetly disclosed the fact, that, under the hood of the carriage, was Miss Sanzier, and that Mr. Naughton was kissing her.

A few minutes afterwards, Armand Sanzier, revolver in hand, lurched furiously into the dining-room and found it empty. He then floundered on to the verandah. Cursing freely, he came in again, and had recourse once more to the spirit-case.

He then began to laugh, not heartily—he never did, under any circumstances—and suddenly snatching up a lamp, staggered across the floor.

With a very suspicious air of having been listening and watching, Miss Sanzier's maid, Croizette, confronted him in the doorway.

"What do you want here?" he growled.

"I come to warn Monsieur not to wait for Mademoiselle, who is a little ill, and who has gone to bed," she said glibly, as if repeating a well-learnt lesson.

"Ill or not, in bed or out of it," he mumbled, "I must tell her—ho, ho!—I must tell her at once how I have frightened away this gay lover of hers—ho, ho, ho!" And he had to steady himself against the wall until he had finished laughing over the rout and retreat of the panic-stricken Naughton. "But you," he said to the abigail, who, arms akimbo, had been joining merrily in his mirth, "can go to bed. Where are the others?"

"The domestics have but shortly gone to the ball of quality at Hootsville. Mademoiselle gave them leave this afternoon," she added, with a sly look. "Ah, how I love the dance! but I dare not abandon my dear mistress. Good-night then, Monsieur Armand."

"Be off!" was the gracious reply, as the good man of Lagaras started on his visit of comfort to his niece.

It was rather difficult steering for one in his state, so the rats seemed to think, as he nearly trod on their tails in the gloomy corridors; but he reached at last, without any accident, Miss Sanzier's part of the house. He knocked, at first softly, then viciously, calling to his niece to open. He tried the handle, but the door was locked and the key was gone. Thereupon he pummelled vigorously, and was even rude enough to kick at the lower panels, and, very soon losing the little patience he possessed, he put his huge shoulder to the daintily-painted door and sent it flying, lock and all.

Boiling with rage, he burst into the sitting-room, and dashing aside a chair, which stupidly stood in his way, he stumbled on into the bedchamber beyond.

Putting down the light, he peered about, calling:

"Delphine! Delphine!"

But no Delphine replied. He staggered to the bed, and pulled aside the hangings. The bed was empty. And on the table near the lamp lay a tiny note addressed to him. He took it up and read:

> I shall return with my husband. Good-bye. Thy niece—
>
> Delphine.

He sat down brooding over the ruin of his schemes till he gradually grew sober, and a plan of action occurred to him.

Half-past eleven! And Naughton's steamer sailed at daybreak. Yes, there was still a chance of catching them. They couldn't be far ahead. Ha, ha! he might turn the tables on them yet! And, restored to something like his old self by the prospect of revenge and success, he rushed from the room, ran along the passages, crossed the courtyard, and strode into the stables. Cursing the absence of the "hands"—who were away dancing at Hootsville—he hastily saddled a horse, and clattered off in pursuit of his niece.

The road between Lagaras and Hootsville—scarcely broad enough to allow two carriages to pass with ease—descended through the valley of the Blaucbec Range, now passing a deep ravine on the one side and high banks and masses of rockwork on the other, and now winding through the thick plantations above the town. But Sanzier knew every inch of the familiar road, and, thinking only of his meeting with Naughton, pushed at a reckless pace down the cañon.

In turning a shoulder of the highway—the St. Lucie route it was called—he suddenly sighted ahead of him a covered cart or buggy, whose bright lamps made lanes of light in the surrounding darkness.

"I have them! Hooray, I have them!" he roared in triumph, slashing his already terrified horse over the head in the heat of the moment.

In a few seconds he was at the side of the carriage, calling fiercely to the driver to stop. The reply was a fearful blow across the face from the butt-end of a whip, and Sanzier reeled in his saddle.

The blow would have been repeated had not a girl in the back of the cart flung herself on the driver's upraised arm, and arrested the stroke, while Sanzier, sick and stunned, sank forward on his horse's neck, and thus failed to see that his assailant was Naughton's servant, and that the woman was Croizette.

But now the driver again urged on his team, and rapidly descended the hill towards Hootsville, leaving Sanzier behind, swaying to and fro in his stirrups.

The effects of the blow, however, very quickly wore off, leaving Sanzier in a more infuriated state than ever, and he charged down the steep and narrow road after the buggy, bent on vengeance, and reckless of the consequences.

He soon caught them up, and pursued and pursuers side by side tore down the incline, on their left a deep ravine, on their right a wall of cliff.

"Stop or I'll fire!" he yelled, drawing his pistol, as he galloped on the near side of the cart, perilously near the precipice.

But his threat was wasted, for the horses had now got beyond their driver's control, and dragging the frail vehicle at breakneck speed, they plunged, bumped, and rattled over the wretched road, still further excited by Sanzier's shouts and Croisette's screams.

Sanzier levelled at the near wheeler, and fired. The horse fell, ploughing up the mud and stones, and capsizing the cart.

The hood struck Sanzier's shoulder before he could rein up, and his horse swerved against the paling at the edge of the ravine. It smashed like tinder, while the ground broke away beneath the struggling hoofs of the frightened animal.

Sapped by the late rains, a huge piece of the roadside slipped, and, before Sanzier could disengage himself, horse and man were hurled out of sight.

Meanwhile, Naughton and Delphine were driving quietly in the opposite direction, along the high road from Lagaras to St. Lucie, intending to wait at that port for the steamer with their servants and luggage. But, upon hearing the fate of Sanzier, they returned at once to Hootsville, attended by the bruised but faithful Croisette, and her companion, Naughton's servant, with his arm in a sling.

The body of Armand Sanzier, was afterwards recovered and now rests in the cemetery of the Catholic Church at Hootsville.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Abyssinian War.

1867.

IN 1860 a Mr. Plowden, who had been appointed British Consul in Abyssinia some nineteen years before, was, whilst journeying to Massowah, attacked by a band of rebels and killed.

The King of Abyssinia, in a dispatch to Queen Victoria shortly after, expressed his regret at what had happened; but the contrition of a potentate who held the opinion that he had been specially created and raised from a lowly position to be the ruler of the country, was not likely to be very sincere, so when Captain Cameron, the new Consul, following the policy of his predecessor, promised that Britain's protection should still be continued to the people living on the frontier district of Bogos, the dusky monarch publicly proclaimed his displeasure.

The king's rage was presently increased by a visit which Captain Cameron paid to Egypt, a country the king professed to despise.

Although Earl Russell signified his disapproval of the Consul's visit, he did not think it politic to tell the monarch so, which so annoyed his majesty, that he addressed a strong remonstrance to the Queen. When he found that his letter was not likely to be answered he determined to be revenged.

So he laid hands on all the Europeans he could find, including Captain Cameron himself, had them beaten, heaped on them the greatest indignities, and then, loading them with chains, cast them into the dungeons beneath his palace.

Repeated attempts to procure their release having failed, it dawned on the authorities that it would be as well to send an answer to the letter the irate monarch had sent to the Queen.

This was accordingly done, but the apology or whatever it was intended to be was so clumsily worded that when it reached Cairo it was sent back to England for revision.

The officials found the composition of the next letter so absorbing that they quite forgot to affix the royal seal.

Still, the oversight was not discovered till March 1865.

The wrath of the tyrant was now fairly bubbling over. The country was by this time becoming interested in the matter, but discussion was burked by the ministry declaring that anything said in the House of Commons would reach the Emperor's ears, and prevent a pacific termination.

The Conservative government, which shortly after came in, tried to secure the release of the captives by offering a handsome ransom, but as this was haughtily declined on the grounds that the King of Abyssinia was

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the richest potentate in the world, hostilities became inevitable.

At the moment when it was decided to send out an expedition, Abyssinia was to us practically an unknown country. We knew that its ruler had in his youth followed the humblest of callings, that on becoming sovereign he had called himself Theodore, King of Ethiopia, there being an ancient prophecy that a king of this name should become master of the world, a prediction moreover supported by the inscription on the seal affixed to State documents: King of Kings.

It was also said that his palace at Magdala was situated on the top of a rock 10,000 feet high, that it was absolutely impregnable, and further that the people, in addition to being the oldest christian community in the world, were extremely brave and warlike. Still, to all intents and purposes, the country was a sealed book.

Travellers, it is true, had visited the land, but their accounts of it differed. Some described it as fertile in the extreme, full of broad plains watered by numerous rivers; others declared that it was so intersected by mountains that thorough exploration was impossible. Those who described the land as fertile recommended that the Army should be sent without an extensive commissariat, whilst those who held the opposite view maintained that not only was the country unsuited for military operations, but as it barely supported its own population an invading army, which did not bring its own supplies, would starve.

The folly of sending an army into a country about which so little was known, filled Europe with amazement. To-day it pleases our critics abroad to describe us as selfish, grasping, cunning and unscrupulous. We must have sadly changed, and rapidly, too, since 1867, for in that year one of the Berlin papers, speaking of us, said: "The English were always a quixotic race delighting in foolhardy enterprize. The cheerfulness, nay, the eagerness they are displaying to enter on a war which may not only end in defeat, but is certain to cost a vast sum of money, shows that for all their business aptitude they are the most stupidly romantic people in the world."

Foreign newspapers were filled daily with letters on the folly of the expedition. Some drew ghastly pictures of the malaria on the coast, and the unhealthiness of the interior. Others declared that the men would die of thirst, whilst some learned savant of world-wide reputation dwelt unctuously on herds of enormous and remarkably active hippopotami with a liking for human flesh. In fact every animal and reptile antagonistic to the life of man was, according to the European press, to be found in Abyssinia. The horrors they depicted varied, of course, but all agreed that the expedition would never return.

France plainly intimated that our shrewdness was leavened with a large mixture of insanity. But the public took no heed of this gibing. Its pride was touched. Some Englishmen had been murdered and others were in prison, and they were not going to stand that sort of thing with impunity.

It might be a pity, perhaps, to destroy the romance clinging to a nation which boasted a succession of monarchs claiming direct descent from Menelik, son of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, but the prestige of the country was imperilled and we had a duty to perform.

If Englishmen could be ill-treated and murdered in Abyssinia, they could be murdered elsewhere. The bond which held our vast Empire together was prestige. That gone, we might as well retire from business, and this we did not intend to do. So it was no use telling us that Abyssinia was an unknown land. Our generals would have to be a shade more careful, that was all, and not be above taking advice. They were quite clear on that point.

Military science is all very well, but in a country about which nothing was known the advice of one person was quite as good as that of another. We are not without our fireside strategists to-day, and ther is a disposition to sneer at their conclusions, although, if there is any truth in the saying that "the lookers-on see most of the game," they are not so very far out after all.

But however well-equipped our amateur critics may be to-day, they are not nearly so numerous as they were in 1867. It is said that before the expedition started, over 30,000 letters were sent to the War Office as to how the operations should be conducted. Perhaps the strangest fact of all was that supporters of King Theodore were non-existent.

The general selected to head the Army was Sir Robert Napier, an Indian officer of Engineers. After much controversy, in which the public had a good deal to say, it was resolved to get it ready in Bombay. The strength of the force was hotly debated, but at length it was decided that to bring the despot to his senses 10,000 troops would be sufficient.

The first detachment arrived in Annesley Bay on the coast of Abyssinia in October in 1867. Needless to say, the prospects of success were not very great. The mismanagement which had characterised so many of our past wars was not absent in the Abyssinian expedition. Fortunately, a certain Mr. Thomas Atkins was interested in the forthcoming affair. He had pulled the country through on other occasions, and it was believed he would now.

It will scarcely be credited that the Government, after giving the command to Sir Robert Napier, a military man, proceeded to tie his hands by confiding all the work of preparation to a civilian, Sir Seymour Fitzgerald, Governor of Bombay: with the result that Sir Robert Napier had to consult the Governor, who knowing nothing of military matters, had in turn to consult his secretary, a gentleman whose knowledge (although he had been in the Army years before) was not much greater than his own.

To show how this truly wonderful arrangement worked, we will give one instance: Sir Robert submitted a plan for a transport train, rather an important matter in a country which boasted few roads and no railways; one would have thought that coming from an engineer officer and a most capable one into the bargain, it would have been at once accepted. Quite the reverse. The Governor had to be mindful of his dignity and the traditions of red tape.

Besides, he distrusted Sir Robert; he had somehow got to think that Sir Robert was a relic of the bow and arrow period, and was in all respects a most inefficient officer.

So he sniffed at the scheme and passed it on to his secretary, who, having forgotten all he knew about transport working, if indeed he ever knew anything at all, consulted a friend who did.

This, of course, led to a delay so prolonged that Sir Robert Napier actually landed in Abyssinia without any plan for feeding his army.

Of course the truth leaked out, and when it transpired

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Drawn by] **Theodore shot himself just as two of our men entered the room.** *[Lawson Wood.*

that the friend of Sir S. Fitzgerald's secretary had never been in Abyssinia or drawn up a plan before, the Press waxed wrath.

But the public did not lose its self-possession. The disasters of the Crimea lingered ruefully in their memories.

They thought we were in for a bad time, but with marvellous calm—sure sign of a nation's greatness—they set their teeth and looked to Tommy to pull them through as he had done before.

They were too generous, as they are now, to single out individuals for attack when it was the system which was at fault. The representatives they sent to the House of Commons always absented themselves from debates on military subjects, so the fault was really their own. But they let it be known that as Sir Robert Napier was to lead the expedition he ought to have full power, and as the War Office after much co-agitation also adopted this view, things began to look more hopeful.

The expedition, which numbered 11,770 men of whom a large proportion were Indian troops, then made their way slowly across the mountain passes to the great table land beyond, some 9,000 feet above sea level, reaching the summit without mishap.

This was fortunate, for Abyssinia in those days being almost an impassable country, a slight resistance might have greatly delayed the progress of the expedition. But Theodore, although of supernatural origin, was extremely cruel, and consequently anything but popular with his subjects.

Tyrants they did not mind, because of liberty, as we know it, they had no conception, but they had a weakness for living as long as possible, so after their ruler had excelled all his previous efforts by burning and killing 3,000 of them in one month they forgot all about his not having been born in the usual conventional manner and rose in rebellion.

When the peasantry and mountaineers were joined by most of the army the authority of Mr. Theodore (as one of his captives persisted in calling him) was limited to his camp and capital. Finding the former unsafe he removed it to the vicinity of his capital, and whiled away the time which intervened before the British troops arrived, by daily interviews with his prisoners thinking, after the customary manner of tyrants, to derive amusement from their fears by treating them well one day and threatening them with death the next.

But the five captives being Britons were so little moved that when the King on one occasion pointed out a big gun, which he called Sevastopol, he was advised to change the name as the soldiers, if they heard it, would insist on carrying the gun back to England.

The troops on their march across the rocky highlands of Abyssinia met with no resistance from the inhabitants who, on the contrary, appeared extremely pleased to see them so long as they paid for their provisions which of course they did. Still they suffered on the march the greatest hardships which a British soldier can be called on to endure.

He will do as much fighting as you please, but he likes his meals regular, so as the commissariat was not able to keep pace, especially when the soldiers were crossing mountain ranges many peaks of which were 10,000 feet high, dinner soon came to be regarded as a luxury, and supper as a legendary meal.

Still the men never murmured. They had been sent to release their fellow countrymen, kept in chains by a "blackamoor king," as they put it, and they meant o get them out.

It took a great deal of explaining to render the object of the expedition clear to the Indian soldiers, but before Magdala was reached they were quite as enthusiastic as their companions.

After a toilsome march the army in April entered a deep ravine through which the river Bashilo flows, and emerging found themselves on the direct road to Magdala.

On Good Friday Colonel Phayre went ahead to reconnoitre. The approach to the Capital seemed inviting enough, but a few miles further on the character of the scenery entirely changed.

A huge tangible inextricable mass of mountains rose up on every side, so admirably adapted for an ambuscade that it became necessary to devise a fresh plan of approach.

Before any possible enemy could have interposed the little army was divided into two bodies which, by avoiding the beaten tracks, contrived to approach the three hills Islamgee joined to Fahla hill on which Theodore's palace stood, the site of the king's camp and Magdala.

These hills, situated about a mile and a half from each other, formed a sort of three cornered amba so mutually protecting each other that attack seemed almost hopeless.

Colonel Phayre was an extremely wily officer who, having no faith in frontal attacks, sent a body of troops and a mountain battery under the command of Colonel Milward round the right up the Arogee Pass. At the top of this our men found King Theodore who immediately opened fire.

Sir Robert Napier who had reached an eminence on the left at once sent the Punjab Pioneers to their support, and the fight soon became tropically warm.

Colonel Milward's men were so exposed, and the king's position was so excellent, that the little force began to waver, but the Naval Rocket Brigade, under Commander Fellowes, and the Mountain Battery, under Colonel Penn, got into play, doing great execution.

Then the 4th Regiment (the King's Own) appeared on the scene, and their snider rifles made terrible havoc in the enemies' ranks. The Abyssinians, it must be confessed, proved themselves worthy foemen that day. How they kept their ground at all when from all sides sniders, mountain guns, and rockets were pouring in the most deadly volleys was marvellous. The pluck with which they time after time sought to regain their positions from which they had been dislodged won the admiration of our troops.

They had been terribly disconcerted by our plan of attack, having been led to believe that we should storm the hill in one compact body. Hemmed in as they were, they clung till dislodged from their last stronghold, leaving, when they retreated, over 500 dead on the ground and 1,500 wounded, Theodore's favourite general being amongst the slain. Beaten as they were they hung on our flank and gave a loud cheer when Sir Charles Stavely, tired of butchery, sounded the bugle for a retreat to camp.

The Abyssinians, for all their bravery, must have been poor marksmen in those days for, incredible as it may seem in the light of modern warfare, we had not a single man killed, and only nineteen wounded.

The king was naturally dismayed at this crushing defeat, so sent Mr. Flad and Lieutenant Prideaux, two of his prisoners, into our camp next morning with a flag of truce to make terms.

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Sir Robert Napier insisted that all the captives should be sent into his camp and this accordingly was done. On the 13th of April two brigades of 5,000 men each moved forward to attack Magdala itself.

Of the strength of the capital it is impossible to give any adequate idea. The three hills already mentioned resembled a roughly-shaped T.

The suitability of their formation for military purposes was increased by their not only being several hundred feet above the level of the plain, but the sides were broken up into scarps and terraces so precipitously faced as to form perhaps the strongest natural fortress in the world.

It is equally impossible, from any written description, to realise the strength of Magdala itself. It is protected by lofty overhanging cliffs so steep and sheer, that not even the hardiest of the mountaineers had ever been known to scale them.

The only approach was by two narrow paths, north and south, which led up to a strong gateway. It was by the northern path as being on the side of Selassee that our troops were called on to effect an entrance.

Monster, murderer as Theodore was, commiseration cannot be withheld him in this the hour of his fall. Behind the gateway he stationed himself to meet the onslaught of the finest troops in the world. His followers were few for the bulk of his army had fled.

The troops as they advanced rained a storm of lead on the gateway which, being strongly protected by a stockade was affected very little. But the obstruction which had resisted the bullets was made short work of when our soldiers tested its quality with the butt end of their muskets. The moment it was levelled the troops rushed into the fortress and a desperate hand-to-hand struggle ensued.

The warriors who had remained faithful to the fallen fortunes of their monarch, believing firmly in his supernatural origin, thought that a delay of even a few minutes would give the angels time to carry him away. Impostors may dupe their followers but not themselves.

Theodore took advantage of the few moments respite allowed him, to climb to a higher apartment. The soldiers were close upon his heels but Theodore had killed too many of his own subjects not to know how to take his own life. He shot himself just as two of our men entered the room.

Amongst the dead at the gateway were several of Theodore's devoted chiefs, the most notorious being Ras Engedda, a worthy who was strongly in favour of murdering the European prisoners.

Sir Robert having conquered the country, or rather the capital, was terribly puzzled to know what to do with it. Had the Abyssinian war occurred in these days we should probably have annexed it. But Sir Robert, knowing nothing of Imperial expansion, presented it to a chief named Gobaze, but that worthy for some reason or other declined the offer. Anxious, however, to prevent the city falling into the clutches of the Gallas, a fierce Mohammedan tribe and the hereditary enemies of the christian Abyssinians, he resorted to the agency of fire. Accordingly it was burnt to the ground. The guns, too, were destroyed, in fact so completely was the work carried out that to use the words of Sir Robert Napier in a dispatch home "nothing remains but a blackened rock."

Napier on his return to this country was elevated to the peerage and on his death was accorded a public funeral.

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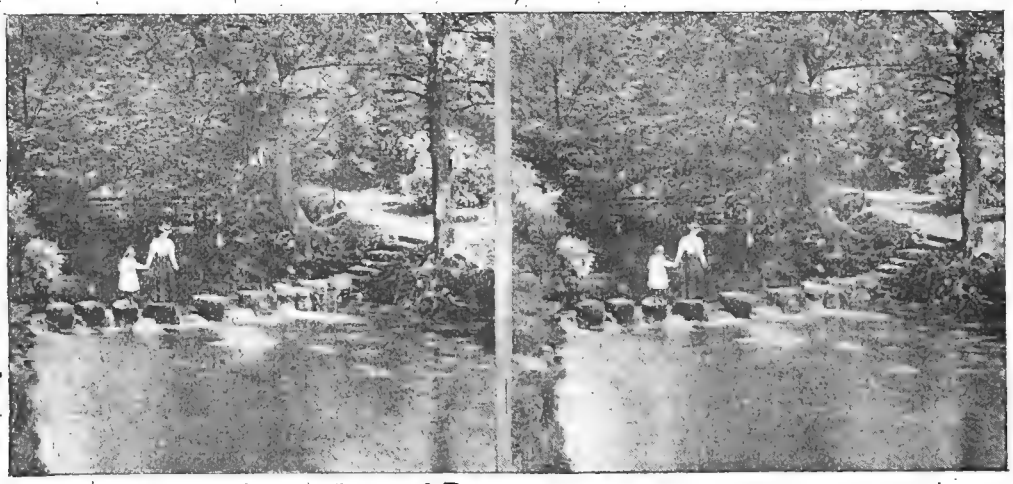

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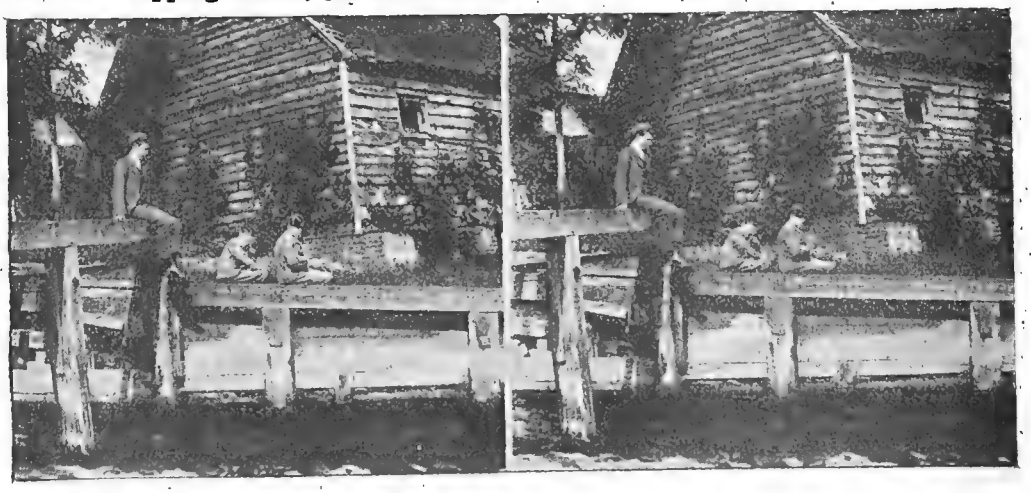

A Brief Rest.

Billiard-room at Beaulieu.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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TALES TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

On a recent evening a guest was introduced to the club in the person of a Mr. Percy from Colorado, and as his presence there was likely to be of rare occurrence, he was promptly called upon for a story. He complied by telling the company how once upon a time he had been

NEARLY ✻ LYNCHED.

WHILE we were in camp at Lost Cañon, Colorado, we were greatly disturbed one morning by the discovery that "Rob," my brother John's favourite riding horse, was missing. My brother, I should perhaps explain, was superintendent of a railway survey party which had been in the West for several seasons. I had but recently joined the party.

The other animals of our little train were on hand as usual, but this fine horse which, every morning as regularly as the sun rose, came whinnying to the camp-fire for his accustomed treat of cold biscuit which John never failed to have laid by for him, was absent.

A careful search of the ground where the horses had been grazing led to the finding of several suspicious signs. First, there was the track of a shod horse, whereas all of ours were unshod; secondly, a half-masticated quid of tobacco, still moist, an article which none of us used in that form except "Old Joe," and he had not been in that part of the cañon for several days; and thirdly, some shreds of woollen yarn hanging on a grease-wood brush, such as might have been torn away from a saddle blanket.

We followed the trail of shod horses for a mile or two up on the *mesa*, in the direction of the ranches on the Mancos, but there we lost it.

Returning to the camp, John saddled one of the other horses and rode over to the Mancos to make inquiries of the ranchers there, but returned without having learnt anything either of the horse or of the thief.

We were all satisfied that the horse had been stolen, and all, especially John, were angry. To steal a horse in that country, where a man's comfort depends upon being well mounted, is considered a capital crime. Had the thief fallen into our hands, he would have met with but little mercy.

But the third morning after Rob's disappearance we heard his familiar whinny as he led up the band, as usual, for his morning ration. Though, as John used to say, he could do "everything but talk," we could never find out where he had been during his three days' absence, or how he had managed to get back.

About a week afterwards it became necessary for John to go to Animas City to replenish our stock of food; but on the evening before he was to start, in driving up the horses "Brimstone," a vicious bronco, aimed a kick at him, which, striking the knee, so disabled him that he could not sit in the saddle without great discomfort, and it was decided that I should make the trip in his place.

I was a stranger in that country, as I have said, but the trail was an easy one to follow and I started early in the morning, riding Rob, and leading one of the other horses upon which to pack back the supplies.

John had a fine, new *aparejo*, or pack-saddle, at Animas, which I was to get and use on the return journey, so I took none with me. I was to stop at Parrott City over night, ride down to Animas, make my purchases, return to Parrott, stay there the second night, and then return to camp.

I reached Parrott, and as I rode down the one street of the city, I noticed that I seemed to be an object of interest to every one I met—all men, for there was not a woman or child at that time in the place, except the old French landlady of the "Miner's Rest."

Every one whom I met would stop, look at me, then at the horse, and, turning, gaze after me as I kept on towards the hotel. They began to collect in groups, and to follow me as I rode along.

Why I should thus be the "cynosure of every eye" I could not at first imagine. I was neither so handsome nor so ugly as to attract especial attention, and surely the presence of a stranger was not so uncommon a thing in that part of the country as thus to excite a

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whole community. Finally I decided that it must be the horses, for both "Rob" and "Witch" were fine animals, and I knew that every man in that section was interested in a good horse.

By the time I had put up my beasts and ordered supper there were at least a dozen men collected at the hotel, looking at and evidently talking about me.

While I was at the table I could see them peering in at the window and open door, and I began to feel somewhat annoyed by their uncivil curiosity, so different from anything I had before met with in the West.

By the time I had finished and sauntered out to the porch, the crowd had increased to the number of at least thirty. I seemed to detect a threatening air in their muttered talk and sidelong glances at me.

As I sat down in one of the battered chairs, the

Why I should be the "cynosure of every eye," I could not at first imagine.

crowd, as by common consent, massed together at the foot of the steps leading up to the porch, and what seemed to be a committee of investigation detached itself from the rest, and came up to where I sat. The foremost, a small, quiet man, with a grizzled beard and a cool grey eye drew near and addressed me.

"Stranger, I'd like to ask you a few questions," he said, gravely.

"All right, drive on!" I answered, curtly, for I was beginning to grow angry at what I considered the impertinent attention of which I was the object.

"What might your name be?"

"It might be Smith," I replied, derisively.

"And where might you be from?"

"China."

"Where did you get that horse you're riding?"

"Stole him, of course!" sarcastically.

"Reckon you did, but you are pretty cheeky to acknowledge it. I'm the sheriff of this county, and I'll have to ask you to come with me."

"Come with you? Where? What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll have to arrest you till this matter is settled."

"Arrest me! What matter?" I gasped, thoroughly taken aback.

"Till you can prove how you came by that horse."

"What do you mean? You don't take me for a horse-thief, do you?"

"That's just it, so come along."

"Pshaw!" broke in another of the committee, "What's the use talking? Hain't he split on himself and 'knowledged he stole the hoss?"

"But, gentlemen," I spoke up alarmed, for matters seemed to be growing serious. "it's all a mistake. The horse is mine, or at least, my brother's."

"Mebbe your brother's name is Smith, too?" queried one of the committee, grimly sarcastic.

"The way of it is just this," broke in the sheriff. "One of these horses you have here, I think, is John Percy's riding-horse, and when I was over on the Mancos about a week ago he told me he'd been stolen—"

"Yes," I interrupted eagerly, "so he was, but he came home the next day."

"That's too thin!" growled one of the others, while the sheriff went on:

"And I promised to keep a lookout for him. You may be his brother, as you say," he added, doubtfully, "but I've known him for ten years, and never knew he had a brother. Besides, you and he don't favour each other very much."

That was true; two brothers were never probably more unlike in personal appearance than John and I. He was of medium height, massively built, with coal black hair and eyes. I was tall, slender, and very decidedly blonde.

"But I tell you I am his brother!" I answered, energetically.

"Haven't you got anything about you that will prove it?"

I searched my pockets thoroughly, but I could not find a scrap of anything to prove my personal identity. My note-book and a few letters, addressed to myself, I had left in my other coat. The crowd, which by this time, had surged up the steps, began to growl ominously.

The sheriff went on:

"If you are Percy's brother, what are you doing over here? He told me he was camped on Lost Cañon, and was going to leave for Montezuma Valley in a few days."

"So we are, and I am on my way to Animas to get some provisions before we move."

"How are ye goin' to get over?" asked one of the crowd.

"Pack it on the other horse."

"Ye ain't got no pack-saddle, and even if ye be a

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tenderfoot, ye ought to know ye can't pack grub on a bareback hoss."

"But John has an *aparejo* in Animas, and I am going to get it."

"Whar's the happy-rayo at?"

Just then, when I needed it most, my treacherous memory played me false. For the life of me—and it began to look as if it were for my life, indeed—I could not remember the name of the man in whose care the *aparejo* was left.

The crowd watched me with lowering looks, and the growls, meanwhile, were becoming more ominous than ever.

Another investigator spoke up:

"Where did ye get that hoss ye're leading?"

"She's John's, too."

"Bought her mighty lately, then. Didn't have her last summer when I saw him in Silverton."

As I did not know when John had bought the mare I could say nothing.

"Boys," went on the other, "I'm blamed if I don't b'lieve that's the mar' was stole from Jim Pate at Hermosa a couple o' months ago."

"Didn't he say it was a bay filly, four year old, with a white star in her forrid?"

"That's so!" "That's the critter!" "He's stole 'em both!" "Stretch his neck for him!" were some of the cries that broke from the crowd, and a rush was made in my direction.

The sheriff had been standing quietly by while this colloquy was going forward. But now, quick as a flash, he caught me by the arm with a grip of steel, whirled me behind him, and the long barrel of his revolver was levelled in the face of the angry mob.

"None of that, boys," he said, coolly. "No hanging here, please."

"But he's a horse-thief!" yelled some in the crowd.

"Maybe he is, though I don't more than half believe it. But even if he is, I'm the sheriff of the county and it's my place to see he has a fair trial. Come, now, boys, I don't want any fuss, but—you—can't—have—this—man." and each word fell with a slow, ringing determination in the accent, which showed the mettle of the man. The crowd evidently knew that he was determined, for no one stirred, and there was dead silence for a minute, till someone in the rear called out:

"What ye feared of? Goin' ter let one man bluff ye? Make a rush. He won't shoot nobody."

"Ah, Bob Lowder, is that you? Spoilin' for a fight, as usual! If you want the man why don't you come and take him? Stand back, boys, and give Lowder a chance to show his 'sand.'"

The shot told; and with the proverbial fickleness of a mob, the men burst out laughing, while cries went up:

"That's it!" "Give Lowder a chance!" "Pitch in, Bob!" "Ye ain't afeard o' one man!" "Oh, no, Harry Lee won't shoot!"

But Lowder failed to come forward, and Lee turning to me, said:

"Well, cap, I don't more than half believe you're a horse-thief, but I'll have to take care of you till we can straighten this thing out. Come, boys, go home and go to bed. I'll tend to this man."

"But," I objected, growing bolder as the danger seemed to lessen, "you have no warrant for me and you have no right to arrest me without one."

"Well, we don't go much on warrants out in this country; but if you insist on it, these boys can furnish you one in five minutes, signed by Judge Lynch."

The hint was sufficient for me, and saying, laughingly: "Thank you; I believe I will not insist on it," I followed him through the crowd of roughly-dressed miners, which opened to let us pass.

As soon as we were out of the crowd and away from the hotel, he said to me:

"Lucky for ye I was here to-night. Those fellows are pretty well stirred up. There've a good many horses been stole around here lately; and they've sworn to hang the first horse thief they catch. They're sober now; but if they get a little liquor in them—and they seem to be stringing over to Lowder's saloon—there'll be trouble. By the way, I'll trouble you for your pistol."

The long barrel of his revolver was levelled at the angry mob.

I gave it to him, objecting at the same time and remarking that if there were to be a fight, it would be as well that both of us should be armed.

"But there ain't going to be any fight; I'm going to slip you off up the gulch, and if them fellows, when they get good and drunk, want to tackle an empty cabin, why let 'em. I have got to take you to Animas, and I'll do it, dead or alive."

I hastened to assure him that he need fear no attempt at escape on my part. We soon reached his cabin. As we entered it he said:

"Hold on, I've got a better idea than that gulch business. I say, Jim!" and a boy about [illegible]een years old

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made his appearance, whom I afterwards found to be his son.

"Jim, go and saddle old Dick and ride up the Mancos trail. If anybody sees you, tell him you are going to the saw-mill to see Nellie. You go there sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," the lad answered, with a blush.

"Well, when you come to the old Ute trail turn off, and it'll lead you into the Animas road, just be ow the ford. Hitch Dick there and slip up the creek to the hotel. Tell Mam Frenchy I sent you after the two horses this man left there. Take 'em down the creek to the ford, and we'll meet you there."

Jim departed; and Lee said to me:

"We'll slip out of the back door and into the brush and make for the ford. Wait till I strike a light, so if anybody's watching they'll think we are here."

The door was opened by the yawning landlord.

The lamp lighted, we stole out of the back door and in a minute were safely hidden in the brush which clothed the mountain side. Striking into a trail that led along the side of the hill, half-an-hour's brisk walk brought us to the ford, upon the hither side of which we found old Dick hitched to a sapling.

After a half-hour of waiting, which I improved in strengthening Lee's impression that I had told the truth, we heard a clatter of hoofs up the road. Pulling me back into the thick bushes, Lee waited till the rider or riders were within a hundred yards or so, when he gave a low, mournful hoot like that of the small barred owl. It was answered from the road, and we stepped out, as Jim came clattering up, riding Rob, and leading the mare, both saddled and bridled.

"They saw me," Jim gasped out, breathlessly, "just as I was getting out of the corral, and hollered to me to stop. There was Bob Lowder and big Aleck and Caleb Jones, and about a dozen more. I didn't stop, and they fired at me, but they didn't hit me."

"I'll settle with Bob Lowder for that," growled Lee.

"I knew they would catch me in the bush, so I took to the road and came a-whoopin'," said Jim. "I reckon they've gone for their horses and will be after us pretty quick. They seemed to be just drunk enough to play the mischief. There they come now!" as the breeze bore to our ears the faint tramp of hoofs from up the road.

While Jim was talking, Lee had mounted old Dick and I had sprung to the saddle of the mare.

"What kind of a beast is she?" asked Lee, as we plunged into the ford.

"Which, the Witch? Fastest horse in the country next to Rob here," said I.

"Well, old Dick can keep up with the funeral, I guess," and we climbed to the further bank and dashed away at full speed. Having ridden about three miles, we pulled up and listened.

No sound behind.

"Guess they've given it up for a bad job," said Jim; and we rode on at an easier pace.

Just as we were entering Animas, I happened to remember that I had met, two or three months before, in Silverton, the landlord of the Animas City hotel; and mentioning this circumstance to Lee, I suggested that before he took me to the lock-up, we should ride around to the hotel and see whether he could identify me.

Lee agreed, and we were soon hammering at the hotel door, which was opened by the yawning landlord, half-dressed and with a lamp in his hand.

"Hello, sheriff! That you? What ye doing here at this time o' night?" he drawled out.

"Do you know this man, Cummings?" asked Lee.

"I—ah!—let me see," said the sleepy landlord, holding up the lamp and peering into my face, while I waited anxiously, for I feared, should the test fail, that Lee's confidence in me would be badly shaken.

"I—no—yes; it's Mr. Percy, brother of John Percy of Silverton."

"Sure of it?"

"Well, John introduced him to me as his brother and I reckon he ought to know."

"Yes, I reckon so. Well, Mr. Percy, I'm glad it's all right, and if you are ever taken up again for horse-stealing, you can call on me."

The matter was explained to the wondering landlord, and we all went to bed.

The next day having made my purchases, Lee, Jim and I returned to Parrott City, where the sheriff's explanation set me all right.

I afterwards became very well acquainted with many of my would-be lynchers and had many a joke with them over the time when they were so earnestly bent upon hanging me as a horse-thief.

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The Mutiny on the "Mermaid."

A TRUE TALE OF THE SEA.

CAPTAIN JOHN GOW, his weather-beaten countenance wearing an expression of deep anxiety, slowly descended the companion-ladder and entered his cabin.

He had just come aboard the *Mermaid* after two busy days on shore, and the brief conversation he had held with his first-mate had served to put the usually-cheery skipper in anything but a comfortable frame of mind. Good reason he had to be anxious; for the *Mermaid* had on board a very valuable cargo, including bullion and other specie alone worth some £12,000. Freight of such a precious nature is a source of anxiety to a captain even when he is served by the most trustworthy and loyal of crews. What, then, must it be when, as in the present instance, the whole of the mast hands are strangers—two of them evil-looking foreigners?

Briefly, the occurrences which led up to this unsatisfactory state of things were as follows:

After a long and exceedingly rough voyage from England, Captain Gow had, some six weeks previously, landed a miscellaneous cargo at New York. This done, the much-damaged *Mermaid* had been docked for repairs, during the progress of which, every man of her old crew had deserted. When, therefore, the vessel was once more in sea-going order, it was, of course, necessary to engage a fresh crew for the return voyage to Liverpool.

A few days before our story opens, Captain Gow had been offered a valuable cargo, and it was the negotiations in respect to this that had necessitated his prolonged absence on shore.

The engaging of a crew had been left in the hands of his first mate, Bob Matthews, who had sailed with him for nearly ten years, and who could be relied on to arrange matters well in the absence of his skipper.

When, however, the latter came aboard, Matthews met him with the news that such was the scarcity of disengaged seamen, that he had been compelled to make up a full complement by taking on a couple of foreigners. One of these was a Spaniard, the other a Frenchman; and from the glimpse Captain Gow had caught of them as they stood near the fo'c'sle, the opinion he had formed of the pair was far from favourable.

However, there was nothing for it but to make shift with the very "scratch" crew. "After all," ruminated the skipper, "it's no use meeting trouble half way, and the foreigners *may* turn out all right—one can't always judge by faces."

With which comforting reflection he went on deck and, a brisk breeze having sprung up, the *Mermaid* was shortly afterwards homewards bound.

* * * * *

During the first three days out, the conduct of José Rodriguez and Henri Maupas was distinctly good. Both were first-rate seamen, and as he noted the neat manner in which they did their work, Captain Gow began to feel almost ashamed of his suspicions.

But on the fourth day, events happened which caused his former uneasiness to return. The skipper of the *Mermaid* had just finished his dinner, when the first-mate entered the cabin hurriedly, his big tanned face working with intense excitement.

"Hullo! what's up, Bob?" inquired Gow, pausing in the act of lighting his pipe.

"Mutiny!" gasped Matthews.

The captain sprang to his feet.

"What d'you say?" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"Mutiny—nothin' less!" the mate replied, helping himself to a glass of brandy, with trembling hands. "There's no great harm done yet, but murder's brewin' as sure as Fate! Rodriguez and the Frenchman are both mad drunk—they brought a lot o' liquor aboard somehow, and they've been servin' out grog to the other hands. All the afternoon the Spaniard's been disobeyin' orders, and now the Frenchie and three or four more o' the men are growlin' and cursin' in a way I don't like."

"We must clap the scoundrels in irons."

"That's what we mustn't do at present."

"Why not? It's the only way to prevent the mutiny spreading."

"If you'll excuse me for sayin' so, cap'n, it's just the very thing as would bring about trouble. The men have been swillin' raw rum all the afternoon, and they've about reached that ugly state when a word from Rodriguez would make 'em knife us in a twinklin'. That Spanish chap's got a deal o' influence over the crew, and it's my belief he could get 'em to do anythin'."

After a little further argument, Captain Gow was reluctantly won over by the first-mate's counsels. He abandoned the idea of putting the two foreigners in irons—for the present, at any rate. Whilst the men were under the influence of raw spirit, it would have been highly dangerous to meddle with the mutinous ringleaders.

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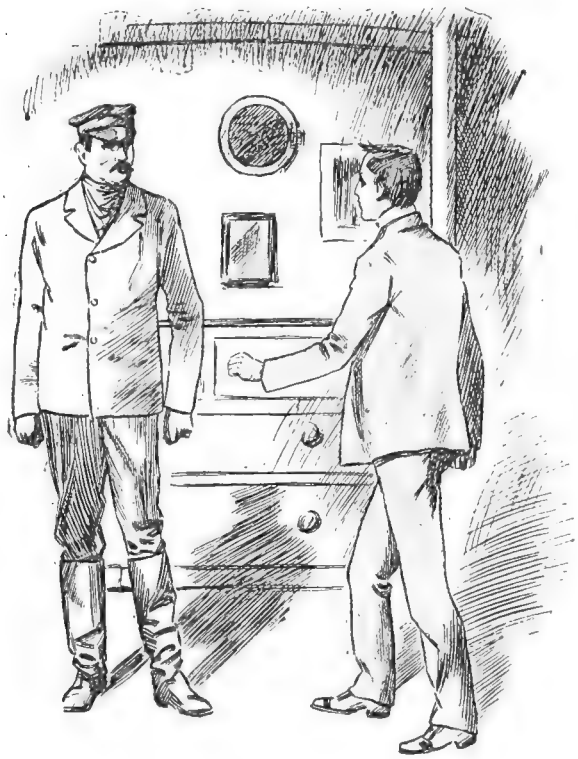
But in order to prevent further intoxication, Matthews and the second-mate—a young fellow named Harvey—were instructed to search the men's quarters on the following day, and to confiscate what remained of the rum which Rodriguez and Maupas had smuggled aboard.

The men had just finished breakfast early on the next morning, when Matthews and Harvey entered to carry out their search.

Captain Gow anxiously paced the quarter-deck, his ears on the alert for any sound of revolt. What he



"Mr. Matthews is not to be found, sir."

dreaded soon happened; for the two mates had scarcely been in the fo'c'sle a couple of minutes, when the skipper heard voices raised in angry dispute.

Then followed the sound of a violent scuffle from the direction of the companion-way.

At this, Captain Gow made a pre-arranged signal to his steward, who instantly appeared with a brace of loaded pistols. Armed with these, the skipper ran to the fo'c'sle, to find that Maupas had thrown Harvey, the second-mate, across the "heel" of the bowsprit, and was gripping him fiercely by the throat.

Bob Matthews was engaged in a furious struggle with Rodriguez, whilst the remainder of the crew looked on and yelled words of encouragement to the foreigners.

Captain Gow took in matters at a glance, and seeing that only prompt measures could save Harvey from being strangled, he covered the Frenchman with a pistol, shouting as he did so:

"Leave him alone, or I'll shoot you dead!"

Maupas looked round, saw the threatening muzzle pointed at his head, and, with a curse, did as he was commanded.

"Up into the foretop, all of you!" roared the skipper, "and venture to come down at your peril."

The men sullenly obeyed.

Rodriguez, having disengaged himself from the first-mate's embrace, was about to follow, when Captain Gow gripped him by the shoulder, and, with the assistance of the mates put the Spaniard in irons.

This done, the steward was dispatched for another brace of pistols, and Matthews and Harvey mounted guard over the mutineers, whilst the skipper entered the fo'c'sle to search for the hidden rum. He soon found a large quantity of the liquor in Rodriguez' locker, and this being safely secured, he returned to the deck.

Then, in a few brief words, he remonstrated with the crew on their mutinous behaviour and on their weakness in being so easily led by a couple of foreign scoundrels, and concluded by expressing a hope that during the remainder of the voyage they would do their duty as honest seamen should.

Apparently quite ashamed of themselves, the men sheepishly muttered regrets, and promised that in future the captain should have no cause for complaint. On the strength of this promise, they were allowed to descend from the foretop, and with the exception of Maupas, who was now placed in irons and secured with his Spanish accomplice, the crew of the *Mermaid* went about their work as though nothing had happened.

On the following afternoon Captain Gow visited the prisoners, who were confined in the vessel's hold. So eloquently did they plead for forgiveness and so profuse were they in their expressions of repentance, that the skipper eventually agreed to release them. This he would not have done, however, had it not been for the fact that he could ill spare a couple of his crew in the working of the ship.

For the next few days he had no reason to regret his clemency, for every man on board went about his duties well and quietly, so that it really seemed as though they were ashamed of their recent behaviour.

It was on the fifth night after the mutinous outbreak, that the next disquieting occurrence of this eventful voyage happened. Going on deck during the mid-watch, Captain Gower ordered all hands to shorten sail. This duty was usually superintended by Bob Matthews, but, on the present occasion, the first-mate was requested to station himself near the fo'c'sle. The night being pitch dark and very rough, the skipper next ordered several sails to be taken in, and this being done to his satisfaction, half the men were allowed to turn in.

The captain himself also entered his cabin; but suddenly bethinking himself of some instructions he desired to give his first officer, Bob Matthews was sent for.

Five minutes passed, and the mate did not answer the summons. Captain Gow began to grow uneasy, a vague consciousness of impending evil took hold of him. He was just about to leave his cabin and ascertain why Matthews did not come, when the steward entered out of breath and with a face the colour of ashes.

"Mr. Matthews is not to be found, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Nonsense!" retorted the skipper, and, without another word, dashed past the steward and up on to the deck.

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He anxiously questioned the watch, and then the men who had turned in were ordered up and interrogated, but all stoutly declared that they had seen nothing of the missing man.

Lanterns were lighted, and every nook and cranny of the vessel thoroughly searched. But to no avail, and at last Captain Gow announced that Matthews must have

Mr. Matthews told his story.

accidentally stumbled overboard in the darkness. This opinion he expressed loudly in the hearing of the crew; but in his heart he knew there had been no accident. That Bob Matthews had met with a violent end at the hands of some of the crew, the captain of the *Mermaid* entertained not the slightest doubt.

Sad at heart, he repaired to his cabin, and sat down to think out a course of action. Suddenly he rose, and accompanied by the second mate, went the round of the ship, taking possession of every firearm that could be found. These were quickly loaded and placed in the cabin in readiness for any attack. Then after warning Harvey and the steward to be on the alert, Captain Gow threw himself wearily on his bunk.

For about half-an-hour he tossed restlessly about; unable to sleep, or to think of anything but the terrible fate of his old ship-mate Matthews.

As he lay thus, he was suddenly startled by hearing a succession of knocks under the ship's counter, just beneath the cabin window. The skipper instantly jumped up, crossed over, carefully opened the window, and inquired in a low whisper:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Cap'n."

It was the voice of the missing mate!

To throw out a rope and haul Bob Matthews through the window, was the work of a few moments. Then as the skipper wrung the other's hand, and assisted in divesting him of his wet clothing, Matthews told his story.

It appeared that upon going to the fo'c'sle, as instructed, he had been suddenly seized from behind by the two foreigners, and thrown overboard, the cries he uttered being totally drowned by the roar of the gale.

Fortunately, however, he was a powerful swimmer, and as the *Mermaid* was not making much way on account of her top-sails being clewed down, he succeeded in getting alongside her.

Another piece of good fortune awaited him in the shape of a rope, which was accidently hanging astern; and, gripping this, he had been towed along for some time in the ship's eddy.

By a superhuman effort he had at last caught hold of a rudder-chain and drawn himself up on to the "jog" of the rudder, where he had prudently lain until the search for him had ended. The rest is known to the reader.

* * * * *

To no single soul on board did Captain Gow make known the fact of Bob Matthew's reappearance. He had obvious reasons for keeping it a secret. During the remainder of the voyage, the first mate was confined in a vacant cabin next to the captain's, who himself supplied him with meals and anything else he required.

No further mutiny was attempted by the crew; so that it was clear that the foreigners had been actuated to their cowardly deed by the sole motive of revenge.

And so, at last, the *Mermaid* sailed up the Mersey, and anchored one bright morning at Liverpool. While the vessel was being warped in dock, Captain Gow quietly sent the steward ashore with a message. Then he stepped below, to reappear a quarter of an hour later with his arm linked in that of Bob Matthews.

A strange scene ensued. On catching sight of the first mate, some of the men uttered cries of superstitious fear, whilst others stood as though petrified, their eyes bulging from their sockets at the sight of the man who was thought to be dead.

As for José Rodriguez and Henri Maupas, it would be difficult to exaggerate the state of their terror. Their brutal faces took on a leaden hue, great beads of perspiration rolled from their foreheads, and they crouched against the mainmast, mumbling unintelligible words and gazing at Matthews with horror-stricken eyes.

And thus they stood when the steward returned with a couple of stalwart police-officers; and, still cowed and mumbling, they allowed themselves to be taken into custody.

In due course the pair stood their trial on a charge of mutiny and attempted murder on the high seas. "Guilty!" was the verdict returned, and, uttering despairing shrieks for mercy, Rodriguez and Maupas were led away to serve the sentence passed upon them—penal servitude for the term of their natural lives.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 8th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. J. W. Crow, 36 Willingham Street, Grimsby, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus *.

"Does this climate agree with you?"

"Yes," answered the weather prophet. "It agrees with me, but not with my predictions."

"My son writes that chasing Boers is frightfully hard work."

"Well, the world is round. Write to him to sit down somewhere, and wait till they catch up with him."

PHLETT: "When a man is in love everything about looks different to him."

Brett: "Yes. It's the same when he knocks his head against a lamp-post."

CRITEEK: "That American Napoleon of Finance whom you have written up in to-day's paper, must be a man of enormous longevity."

Editor: "Why?"

Criteek: "You say, 'He is reported to have made six million dollars in as many years.'"

BROWN: "Have you heard about Edison's latest invention?"

Jones: "No, what is it?"

Brown: "A collar-button with a little phonograph inside that will call out when it rolls into a dark corner under the bed, 'Here I am! Here I am!'"

A FULLY-EQUIPPED fashion-plate huntsman met a young farmer in the roadway and inquired:

"Beg pawdon, young man, but can you tell me whethaw there are any wabbits awound heah?"

"Plenty of them," was the ready reply; "but don't let that worry you, they're harmless."

WE are assured by one of our readers that the following story is a fact:

One of the dentists at a leading health resort is also an energetic colonel of Volunteers. A general officer called one day to have a tooth out.

"Very sorry, sir, but Colonel ——— is on parade."

"Well, then, I will see his assistant, Mr. Smith."

"Very sorry, sir, but Captain Smith is also on parade."

Then the General got impatient.

"Haven't you," he exclaimed, "a bally Admiral on the premises who can pull my tooth out."

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* THE following took place some time ago during the progress of a football match at Newcastle. An elderly spectator was indulging in frequent nips from his pocket-flask, no doubt as a preventative against cold, the weather being anything but conducive to excessive perspiration, when a Northumbrian football enthusiast, probably riled at receiving no invitation to partake of some refreshment, and unable to keep quiet any longer, very dryly remarked:

"I say, mister, th'art a gran' dribbler, but, begor, th'art a poor han' at passin'."

"I HAVEN'T been down to the office for three days."

"Ill?"

"No; my family are going away and I've been helping them find the keys to the trunks."

"ALICE, I do hope you are not getting to be too fond of that young man who lives next door."

"But, mamma, you know we are told to love our neighbours. And I do."

"MR. GROUCH went to a masquerade the other evening disguised as a bear."

"Did anyone recognise him?"

"Only his wife."

MOTHER (to baby): "It's muzzer's little ootsy tootsy; muzzer loves her little darling baby."

Fanny (who has just been spanked): "Don't you believe her, baby. When you (sob) grow up she'll spank you, t-t-too."

ANGELA (to whom Edgar has been proposing): "Tell me, Edgar! Did you ever say anything like this to any woman before?"

Edgar (in a burst of honesty): "My dear girl, do you think it could be done like that the first time?"

"I HAVE called," said the reporter, "to see if you wish to add anything to our account of your wife's reception this evening. We have most of the details and a long list of names, including those who will assist her in receiving."

"No," replied the business man, "there's only one account that I'm expected to take any interest in, and there'll be no one to assist me with that."

MR. Z is an ardent stamp-collector, and recently purchased a rare specimen. On showing it to a brother philatelist, Mr. A, the latter pronounced it a forgery. Next day Mr. A said to Mr. B (who is deaf): "Z has a stamp which, in my opinion, is a forgery on the face of it."

Mr. B to Mrs. B: "Mr. A tells me that, in his opinion, Z has got the stamp of a forger in his face."

Mrs. B to Mrs. C: "I hear that Mr. Z is suspected of being a forger."

Mrs. C to Mrs. D: "Have you heard the news? They've found out that Mr. Z is a forger; but his little game has received a check."

Mrs. D to Mrs. E: "Isn't it dreadful? Mr. Z has been arrested for forging somebody's name on a cheque."

Mrs. E to Mrs. F: "They say that Mr. Z has been forging cheques wholesale, and is now in prison."

Mrs. F to Mrs. E: "I'm not surprised. I always said there was something wrong about him; and the airs his wife puts on too!"

And Mrs. Z now wonders why all her former acquaintances cut her dead when they meet her.

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"Papa, what's the best kind of paper for a kite?"
"Er—fly-paper, my son."

"It's all very well," said the grave-digger, "to advise a young man to begin at the bottom and work upwards; but in my business it ain't practicable."

Bridget: "I will give yez me answer in a week, Larry."
Larry: "That's roight, me darlint, take plinty av toime to think it over. But tell me one thing now—will it be yes or no?"

She: "Everyone in town says we are going to be married."
He: "Well, it's true, isn't it?"
She (sobbingly): "It can't be true, Frederick. You must be deceiving me. If it were true everyone in town would say we were not going to be married."

They were discussing gas bills, the subject being a common one at this place, if not a popular one.
"If you use only a little gas, and are as economical as you can be, the bill is just as big," said Hiland.
"Then why not use a great deal?" suggested Halket.
"I tried that, and the bill was three times as much."

"I am going to sea," the young man said, and paused.
The young girl gasped.
"Oh, Henry—er—Mr. Timmid!"
She could not conceal the tears in her voice.
"I am going to see," he repeated, "your father to-night, if you will give me permission."
Then she fell upon his shoulder.

A lazy and loquacious farmer called at a neighbour's house one morning.
"Sit down, sit down!" exclaimed the neighbour.
"I don't know as I ought," replied the farmer but nevertheless he sat down.
After some talk about the crops, and the value of an adjoining piece of land, the visitor said slowly:
"I don't know as I ought to be sitting here. I came over to see if I could get a ladder; our house is a-fire."

Once when a certain well-known judge was trying a case, he was disturbed by a young man who kept moving about in the rear of the court-room, lifting chairs and looking under things.
"Young man," said his lordship, "you are making a great deal of unnecessary noise. What are you about?"
"My lord," replied the young man, "I have lost my overcoat, and am trying to find it."
"Well," said the venerable judge, with a grim smile, "people often lose whole suits in here without making all that disturbance."

During a severe engagement with the Boers, a young fellow who was a great favourite with the girls at home, was badly wounded in the right arm.
Several of the surgeons declared that it would be necessary to amputate the limb, but it was finally decided that by removing a section of the bone the arm might be saved.
"But," said one of the surgeons, "it will be a bad job, and when healed, the arm will remain crooked."
"Never mind the crook," replied the young fellow; "set it for hugging and go ahead."

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By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXX. (*continued*).

REASONING in this way I rapidly resolved to make a bold effort to conceal for ever the time and place of the fatality. If I failed I could still tell the truth; If I succeeded I might, at my own expense, save a vast amount of unnecessary sorrow.

The desperate expedient came to me of carrying off the body to the untenanted house at Putney where my old master had resided until his death, utilising the four-wheeled cab with its half-drunken driver for the purpose.

If I reached Putney unhindered I could dispose of my terrible burthen easily, for the river flowed past the grounds, and every inch of the locality was known to me.

It occurred to me that perhaps the body might be found and recognised. Our personal linen was never marked, by reason of the fact that our laundry work was done upon our Yorkshire estate, but as a temporary safeguard I resolved to take some different and less valuable outer clothes from Mrs. Hilmer's residence.

Her maid was of similar build to my wife, so I hastened to the girl's room and laid hands upon a soiled coat and skirt which were relegated to the recesses of the wardrobe.

I glanced at my watch as I came back along the corridor. It was 6.15 p.m. All the incidents I have related to you had happened within a quarter of an hour. Oh, Heaven! it seemed longer than all the preceding years of my life.

Having resolved upon a line of conduct, I pursued it with the *sang froid* and accuracy of one of the superior scoundrels delineated by Du Boisgobey. The door of the flat was locked. If the servants, hardly due yet, returned unexpectedly, I would send them off to Victoria Station on some imaginary errand of their mistress'.

I knelt beside my poor wife's body once more, and with some difficulty took off her costume and loosely fastened on the maid's garments.

In her purse there were some bulky documents, which I afterwards discovered to be the reports furnished by a firm of private detectives, detailing all my movements with reference to Raleigh Mansions with surprising accuracy. But she had concealed her name. These men themselves only knew me as "Colonel Montgomery." How Delia first came to suspect me I can only guess. Perhaps my indifference, my absence from home at definite hours, a chance meeting in the street unknown to me—any of these may have supplied the initial cause and led her to verify her doubts before taxing me with my supposed iniquity.

Indeed, her final act in coming alone to Mrs. Hilmer's abode showed her fearless spirit and independent methods. She intended no divorce court revelations. She would have simply spurned me as an unworthy and dishonourable wretch. Her small personal belongings I put in my pockets; the clothes I made into a parcel and stuffed temporarily beneath my overcoat.

Then I unlocked the door and went down the few steps to the main entrance. There was no one about, the fog and sleet having cleared the street—a quiet thoroughfare at all times.

I took the risk of the maids coming back, and I ran to the square for my conveyance. The driver had been improving the occasion, and was more inebriated than before. He brought his cab to the door, and I know, by the appearance of things, that no one had entered during my absence.

With some difficulty I took Delia's body into my arms in as natural a position as was possible, and half-dragged, half-carried her to the cab, leaving the door of the flat ajar. Luck still favoured me. The cabman supposed that she, like himself, was intoxicated. A man came down the opposite side of the street, but he paid not the slightest heed to me, and, indeed, we were but dimly visible to each other.

Exerting all my strength unobtrusively I placed my wife on the rear seat of the cab and then calmly gave the driver my instructions. He grumbled at the distance, but I told him I would pay him handsomely. Searching in my pockets and Delia's purse I could only find some twelve shillings, so, although it was risky, to avoid a quarrel with the man I determined to give him a five-pound note.

So far all had gone well.

The notion possessed me that, to all intents and purposes, I had murdered my wife, and that I was now disposing of the visible tokens of my guilt in the most approved manner of a daring criminal. Whether I did right or wrong I cannot, even at this late hour, decide. Should my death induce forgetfulness I am still inclined to think that I acted for the best. My wife was dead; I was self-condemned. Why, then, allow others, wholly innocent, to be dragged into the vortex?

This was my line of thought. If you, reading this ghastly narrative, shudder at my deeds, I pray you nevertheless to weigh in the balance the good and the ill that resulted from my actions.

At last we reached Putney, and drew up at the end of the disused lane which runs down by the side of the house to the river.

Here, again, the road was deserted. I lifted my wife out, carried her to the postern-gate, and returned to give the driver his note. The man was so amazed at the amount that he whipped up his horse instantly, fearing lest I should change my mind.

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The Old Method and the New

Not without good reason is the present age termed the age of progress. Progress, marked and rapid, is the order of the day in every department of life, including, of course, our domestic and culinary arrangements. For instance, when our grandmothers wished to prepare Jellies for the table, they worked and worried with a multiplicity of materials, and after straining and flavouring and experimenting, the effort frequently ended in failure. To-day the modern housewife with her packet of Chivers' Jelly, produces in a short time, with *a minimum expenditure of trouble and money*, a dainty and wholesome dessert that is a pleasure both to look upon and to taste. Clear, sparkling, and with the fragrance and exquisitely delicate flavour of fruits, Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies are indeed a delight to the eye and palate. To the purity and freshness of the materials employed in their production, as well as the

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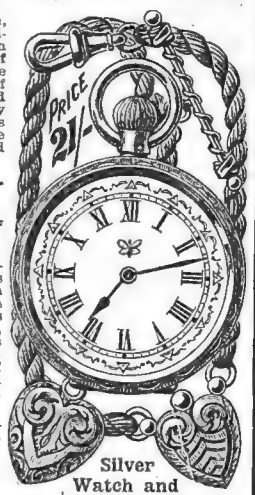

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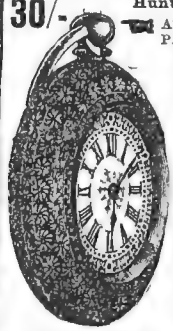

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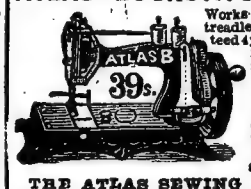

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I was about to force open the old and rickety door into the garden when I remembered the drain-pipe jutting into the Thames—a place where, as a child, I often caused much alarm by surreptitious visits for the purpose of catching minnows. I quickly took off my coat and boots, turned up my trousers and shirt-sleeves, and examined the pipe with my hands.

It exactly suited my purpose. In half-a-minute I had firmly wedged my wife's body beneath it. This was the most horrible portion of my task. The chill water, the desolation of the river bank, the mud and trailing weeds—all these things seemed so vile and loathsome when placed in contact with the mortal remains of my ill-fated Delia.

She had loved me. I believe I loved her, as I assuredly do now when her presence is but a memory, yet I was condemned to commit her to the contaminating beastliness of such surroundings. It was a small matter, in the face of her death, but it has weighed on me since more than any other feature of that cruel night's history.

Before leaving Putney I tied her clothes, hat, and furs to a couple of heavy stones, and threw the parcel into deep water.

By train and cab I reached home but a few minutes late for dinner. It was not difficult for me to act my part with the servants, nor keep up the farce during the weary days that followed. My consciousness was so seared by what I had gone through that the mere make-believe of my position was a positive relief to me.

That night, in the privacy of my room, I recollected the broken fender, and feared lest the ironwork would supply a clue should the body be discovered, a thing I deemed practically impossible.

But, for Mrs Hilmer's sake, I took no risk. Next morning, before I saw you at Tattersall's, I made arrangements for the whole contents of her drawing-room to be transferred to her brother's flat, where, to my knowledge, the articles were needed.

Mrs. Hilmer had gone out early, so the thing was done in her absence. Her amazement was so great that she wired me, using as signature the pet name of her childhood, and this was the first message you heard the groom refer to when he came a second time to the sale with the telegram from Richmond.

I wrote her a hurried note, explaining that I intended the transfer as a sop to her offended brother, but she had to telegraphed again, and I had to go and see her, to learn that Mensmore resented the gift, and had gone off in a huff to Monte Carlo.

A little later I took the supreme step of writing her a farewell letter. Since my wife's death I could not bear to meet any other woman. I communed with my poor Delia more when dead than when alive.

I do not think I have much more to tell you. Step by step I watched you and the police tearing aside my barrier of deceit. At times I thought I would baffle you in the end. Were it not for my folly in bribing Jane Harding I think I must have succeeded.

That poor girl was the undoing of me in the first instance, and she has now brought me my final sentence, for she came to-day and told me, with tears, all that happened between the detective and herself. Winter, too, put in an appearance.

To-morrow, I suppose, he will bring a search warrant if you do not see him first and tell him the truth

Do not misunderstand me. I am glad of this release. When you strove to arouse me from my despair I did, for a little while, cherish the hope that I might be able to devote my declining years to the work which Delia herself took an interest in. But the web of testimony woven round my old friend, Mensmore; the self-sacrificing spirit of his sister, who, to shield me, was willing to suffer herself; the possibility that I might involve these two, and perhaps others, in my own ruin—every circumstance conspired to overwhelm me.

I can endure no more, my dear Brett. It is ended. The past is already a dream to me—the future a void. My poor nature was not designed to stand such a strain. The cord of existence has snapped, and I cannot bring myself to think that it will be mended again In bidding you farewell I ask one thing. If you take a charitable view of my deeds, if you consider that my penalty is commensurate with my faults, then you might take my dead hand in yours and say, "This was my friend. I pity him. May the spirit of his wife be merciful unto him should they meet in the regions beyond the grave."

And so, for the last time, I sign myself

Charles Lyle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Valedictory.

Much as Brett would have liked to inter his dead friend's secret with his mortal remains in the tomb, this was impossible.

Sir Charles Lyle's sacrifice must not be made in vain, and the strange chain of events too strongly incircled other actors in the drama to enable the barrister to adopt the course which would have otherwise have commended itself to him. An early visit to Scotland Yard, where, in company with Mr. Winter, he interviewed the Deputy Commissioner, and a conference with the district coroner settled two important questions. The police were satisfied as to the cause of Lady Delia's death, and the coroner agreed to keep the evidence as to Sir Charles Lyle's sudden collapse strictly within the limits of the medical evidence.

A wholly unnecessary public scandal was thus avoided.

With Lady Delia's relatives his task required considerable tact. Without taking them fully into his confidence he had to explain that Sir Charles had all along known the exact facts bearing upon her death and burial-place, but for family reasons he thought it best not to disclose his knowledge.

Brett needed their corporation in getting the Home Office to give the requisite permission for Lady Delia's re-burial. The circumstance that the deceased baronet had left his unentailed estates to his wife's nephew, joined to the important position Brett occupied as one of the trustees and joint guardian, with the boy's mother, of the young heir, smoothed over many difficulties.

After a harassing and anxious week Brett had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing the remains of the unfortunate couple laid to rest in the stately gloom of the family vault.

The newspapers, of course, scented a mystery in the proceedings, but definite inquiry was barred in every direction. Even the exhumation order gave no clue to the reasons of the authorities for granting it, and in less than the proverbial nine days the incident was forgotten.

Sir Charles had made it a condition precedent to the succession that his heir should bear his name, and should live with his widowed mother on the Yorkshire estate or in the town house for a certain number of months in each year until the boy was old enough to go to a public school.

This stipulation was intended to have the effect of more rapidly bringing his own memory in oblivion. Brett, too, was given a sum of £5,000, "to be expended in bequests as he thought fit."

Reggie understood his motive thoroughly. Jane Harding had been loyal to her master in her way, so he arranged that she should receive an annual income sufficient to secure her from want. Thompson, too, was provided for when the time came that he was too feeble for further employment at Portman Square, and Mr. Winter received a handsome douceur for his services.

Mrs. Hilmer did not even know of Sir Charles Lyle's death until weeks had passed. Acting on Brett's advice her brother simply told her that everything had been settled, and that the authorities concurred with the barrister in the opinion that Lady Delia was accidentally killed.

When she had completely recovered from the shock of the

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belief that her loyal friend had murdered his wife, Mensmore one day told her the whole sad story. But he would allow no more weeping.

"It is time," he said, "that the misery of this episode should cease. When the chief actor in the tragedy gave his life to end the suffering we would but ill meet his wishes by allowing it to unduly occupy our thoughts in the future."

Mensmore's marriage with Phyllis Browne was now definitely fixed for the following autumn, so he carried his sister off with him on a hasty trip to Wyoming in company with Pyne—a journey required for the protection and development of their joint interests in that state.

Not only did their property turn out to be of great and lasting value, but during their absence the Springbok Mine began to boom. Even the cautious Brett one day found himself hesitating whether or not to sell at half over par so excellent were the reports and so extensive the dividends from that auriferous locality.

The two young people were married—a scion of the house had become a lusty two-year-old—Mr. Winter had become Chief Inspector, and Miss Marie le Marchant had, by strenuous effort, risen to the dignity of double-crown posters as a "dashing comedienne"—when Brett's memories of his lost friends were suddenly revived in an unexpected manner.

Mr. Sydney H. Pyne came to him with measured questionings and brooding thought stamped on his brows.

"It's like this," he said, when they settled down to details, "I want to get married."

"To whom?" said Brett, wondering at the savage tone in which the announcement was made.

"To Mrs. Hilmer."

"Oh!"

"That's what everybody yells the moment I mention it. She screams 'Oh!' and runs off with tears in her eyes. Her brother says 'Oh!' and looks uncomfortable, but refuses to discuss the proposition. Now you say 'Oh!' and gaze at me like an owl at the bare statement. What the dickens does it all mean I want to know? I'm not worrying about what happened years ago. Mrs. Hilmer's just the sort of woman I require as a wife, and I'll marry her yet if the whole British nation says 'Oh!' loud enough to be heard and answered by the U—nited States!"

"That's the proper sort of spirit in which to set about the business."

"Yes, sir, but I can't get any forrarder. There's a kind of rock below water which holds me up every time I shoot the rapids. She likes me well enough, I know. She calls me 'Syd' as slick as butter, and I call her 'Gwen,' but there you are—if I want to go ahead a bit she pulls up and weeps. Now why the——"

"Steady, Mr. Pyne. Women weep for many reasons. Do you know her history?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"But perhaps that is exactly what she does want. Remember that she has been married before, with somewhat bitter experience. She probably believes that a husband and wife should have no secrets from each other. Above all else there should be no cloud between them as to bygone events. Mrs. Hilmer is highly sensitive. If she imagined you were under any misapprehension as to the circumstances under which Sir Charles and Lady Delia Lyle met their deaths—do not forget that you were personally mixed up in the affair—she would neither entertain your proposal nor explain her motives. She would just do as you say—run away and cry."

"Well, now, that beats everything," said Pyne admiringly. "That never struck me before."

"It is the probable explanation of her attitude nevertheless."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Write to her. Ask her permission to learn the facts from me. Tell her you believe you understand the reasons for her reticence, and that your only excuse for the request is that you want to go to her on an equal plane of absolute confidence. It seems to me——"

"That I'd better git quick and do it," shouted Pyne, vanishing with the utmost celerity.

Brett still occupied his old chambers in Victoria Street. He did not expect to see Pyne again for a couple of days. To the barrister's utter amazement he returned within ten minutes.

"Fire away!" he cried excitedly. "You struck it first time. I just rang her up——"

"Rang her up?"

"Yes; she's staying at the Cecil for a few days, so I telephoned from the Windsor. I could never put the case in a letter in your words, you know. But switch me on to the end of a wire and I know where I am."

"What on earth did you say?"

"As soon as I got her in the box at the other end I said, 'Is that you, Gwen?' 'Yes,' said she. 'Well,' said I, 'I guess you know who's talking?' 'Quite well,' said she. 'Then,' said I, 'I've just been telling Mr. Brett I wanted to marry you, and that you wouldn't even discuss the proposition. He said you probably wished me to know the whole story of Sir Charles Lyle, but felt kinder shy of telling me yourself. He will get it off his chest if you give him permission, and then I can come along in a hansom and fix things. What do you say?' There was no answer, so I shouted, 'Are you there?' and she said 'Yes,' faint-like. 'Don't let me hurry you,' said I, 'but if you agree straightaway I can catch Brett at home, for I've just left him.' With that she said, 'Very well. You can see Mr. Brett.' And here I am."

"Having accomplished the whole thing satisfactorily."

"As how?"

"Don't you see you have proposed to the lady and practically been accepted?"

"Jehosh! It does look something like it. Say! I'm off! This story of yours will keep until to-morrow."

He would have gone, but Brett jumped after him.

"Not so fast, Mr. Pyne. You must not sail into the Cecil flying a false flag. Kindly oblige me with your attention for the next half-hour."

With that he unlocked a safe and took from its recesses Sir Charles Lyle's "confession." He read the whole of its opening passages, explaining the relations between Mrs. Hilmer and her unfortunate but abiding friend.

The straightforward, honest sentences sounded strangely familiar at this distance of time. Brett was glad of the opportunity for reading them aloud. It seemed a fitting thing that this testimony should come, as it were, from the tomb.

Pyne listened intently to the recital and to Brett's summary of the events that followed.

"Poor chap!" he said, when the sad tale had ended. "I hope you shook hands with him as he asked you to do?"

"I did. Would that my grasp had the power to reassure him of my heartfelt sympathy."

For a little while they were silent.

"So," said Pyne at last, "Gwen thought I would make the same mistake as Lady Delia, and suspect her wrongfully."

"No, not that. But she naturally wished the man whom she could trust as a husband to be wholly cognisant of events in which already he had participated slightly."

"She was right. I like her all the better for it. But, tell me. Is there any necessity for that wonderful document to be preserved?"

"Not the slightest. It has served its last use."

"Then put it in the fire."

Brett did not hesitate a moment to comply with Pyne's wish. The flames devoured the record with avidity, and the two men watched the manuscript crumbling into nothingness. Then Pyne said:

"I must be off to the Cecil."

"Good-bye, old chap," said Brett. "And good luck to you, too. I congratulate both Mrs. Hilmer and yourself."

The End.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Is it necessary to remind you again that Headon Hill's fascinating serial story begins next week? I don't suppose it is, for you who have once read a novel by this popular author are naturally on the look-out for other romances from the same entertaining pen. As for you who have not, I can only recommend you strongly to begin

"The Fate of Michael Standridge"

in the next issue of *Short Stories*.

N.B.—If you have a friend who is fond of a thrilling story, you might tell him.

❦❦❦

Two or three weeks ago, I had a note on the "alleged" (as the newspapers, anxious to avoid libel actions, always say) incivility of post-office officials. Here is a letter from "C. S." (Bury St. Edmunds) on the subject:

"I think 'R. P.' has a good deal of ground for his complaint, for from my own experience and that of my numerous acquaintances, incivility and inattention seem to be pretty general in the suburban post-offices. For one who will go out of his or her way to oblige, half-a-dozen will be the reverse.

"Another thing is that many of the branch post-offices in the suburbs of large towns do not depend on the official salary, sale of stamps, etc., for a living; but many—in fact, I might say, all of them—keep some kind of shop in addition, and it is very annoying to be kept a considerable time waiting for stamps—postal orders, etc., while the post-mistress is engaged in selling toys, stationery, or confectionery, to other customers. The post-mistress seems to think that her own business is to come first before the Government.

"This state of things ought not to be allowed. There should be one officer at least to attend to postal affairs, but in some cases there is not one officer, but sometime three or four young (ladies they would like to be called) girls of some thirteen or fourteen years, attending to postal matters, and not seldom making diverse mistakes. The airs these young 'ladies' give themselves when clothed with a little brief authority would be laughable, were it not annoying, when one is tied to time; and occasionally they will venture to be insolent, as far as they dare to be.

"I hold that a Government official has no right to conduct another business in the same department for the use of which the Government pays him or her a fixed salary, to the inconvenience of the public."

What have post-office officials to say in reply to these statements?

❦❦❦

"Badger" (Lewes) raises the old, old question as to "whether brains and muscle are to be found in the same men." In his opinion, the two things are rarely found together, and he goes on to make the sweeping charge that "athletes are the biggest duffers in the world, empty-headed, and lacking all idea of anything beyond sport."

My correspondent is a man of limited observation, and, as such, should refrain from making general statements of a libellous nature. My experience has certainly never taught me that athletic prowess is incompatible with high mental capacity. Gladstone was a physically strong man, fond of out-door exercise, and "empty-headed" was hardly the word to describe him. Baden-Powell, again, is one of the finest all-round athletes in the British Army, but ask anyone who was present with him in beleaguered Mafeking if he was a "duffer." And Conan Doyle, an excellent cyclist, cricketer, and boxer, can hardly be classed among men "lacking ideas." C. B. Fry, a fine cricketer, footballer, and long-jumper, was not undistinguished intellectually when at Oxford. Instances could be multiplied, had we the space.

❦❦❦

A few days ago I had the pleasure of travelling with a well-known 'Varsity athlete, who astonished me by his intimate acquaintance with English poetry. On his way to the country for a few days' training, he was taking with him volumes of Dryden and Browning. His catholicity of mind was further shown in the fact that he is a regular reader of *Short Stories*.

❦❦❦

"Aspirant for the Laureateship" (Lincoln) sends me the following. Readers are requested not to seek to know his name and address. Whatever his verses be, his intention is good. Let that be his excuse:

I've read fiction galore (and hope to read more),
Since the days I read "Little Boy Blue."
I've read Dickens and Scott—in fact, the whole lot
Of the classics of old times and new;
I've felt my hair rise (like the crust over pies),
And my eye-balls start out of my head;
When a dastardly villain began hero-killin'
And painting his hands ghastly red.
I've thrilled to the bone; gone cold as a stone,
At the thought of a poor heroine
Being troubled and pestered, in lone house sequestered,
As many such damsels have been;
But for good, healthy tales (my muse nearly fails)
For men or the opposite sex,
Commend me to him (this is not a mere whim)
Who writes about bold Pontifex.

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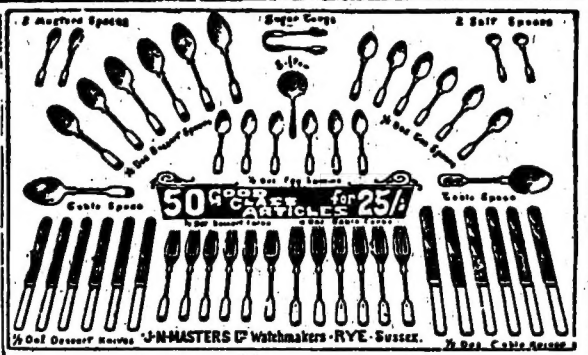

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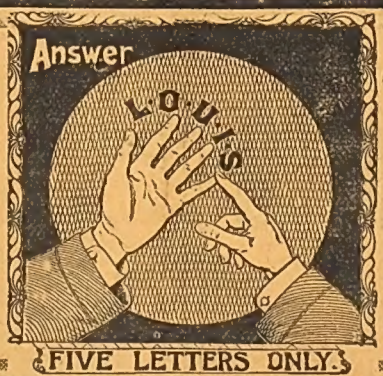

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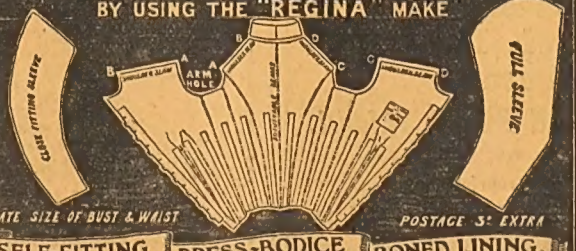

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